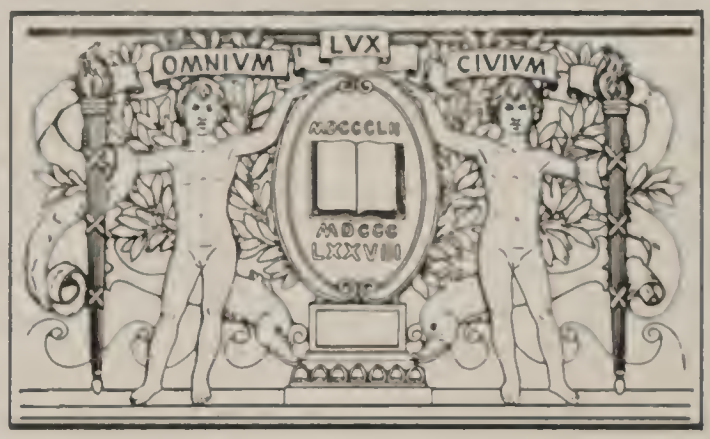
MIS' BASSETT'S MATRIMONY BUREAU

WINIFRED ARNOLD



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Mis' Bassett's Matrimony Bureau

"The first thing my eye lit onto was a great blazin' bed-quilt."

Mis' Bassett's Matrimony Bureau

By
WINIFRED ARNOLD

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W. A.

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I

THE COMING OF MINERVY

I HADN'T no more idee of runnin' a Matrimony Bureau than I had of playin' a hand organ in Chiny, an' it come on me jest as unexpected as a snow-storm on the 4th of July. I declare I couldn't think of nothin' but a story they used to tell when I went to school about a girl named Minervy that wa'n't born in the ordinary way, but leaped full sized out of her pa's forrud. I don't s'pose they tell it now'days for the young ones is so knowin' that they'd never swaller it for a minute, let alone keepin' of it down long enough to get the sense of it. But land o' Goshen, I dunno as I blame 'em much. It's took me sixty odd year to get the gist of it myself, an' I never did reelly see through it till my own big idee popped outer my head. I wonder if Minervy come quite as unexpected to her pa as that Matrimony Bureau did to me—though land, I s'pose things had been leadin' up to it for a long spell.

It reelly begun you might say as fur back as

when my son Lisha got the 'pintment to be post-master after old Mose Perkins died so sudden. At the start off, he hired Mary Maria Collins to help him sort the mail an' pass it out to folks. She's a real likely sorter girl, Mary Maria is, an' kinder in the family, as you might say—bein' Lisha's wife's third cousin's daughter—she that lives up Dilton way an' married Jonas Payne for her second husband. Mary Maria hadn't been in there long tho' 'fore folks begun to kick up an awful rumpus about it an' say she hadn't no business there in a Republican post-office, when Jonas Payne voted Democrat the first time Bryan was up —— Jonas ain't got no gumption, no-how, an' they made him b'lieve that Free Silver meant knives an' spoons an' tea-sets given 'round free gratis for nuthin' to everybody that voted Democrat, *sixteen* to every *one*, they told him, an' when Delia, his wife, hern tell o' that, she never give him a minute's peace till he voted for it —— She'd set her heart on a silver tea-set, Delia had.

Howsumever, that settled Mary Maria's chances anyhow, for—as Lisha says—"Politics is politics," so he had to ship her. There was three or four others spoken of for the place, but a political office like that you jest have to keep

in your own family, you know, an' there didn't seem to be none of our folks that had wit enough an' would come reasonable.

Wal, we talked it over, up an' down, an' in an' out for nigh onto a fortni't, an' we couldn't seem to thrash it out no other way but that Emeline had got to put her shoulder to the wheel an' go down to the post-office an' help. Not that Emeline balked much at the idee, but there was them that said that Lisha hadn't orter put his own wife in there—an' ye know a man in politics has got to look out for the speech o' people. Still, it did seem to be jest the thing for Emeline. She's real int'rested and sociable, Emeline is. She does love a good dish o' talk with a neighbour, an' o' course down to the post-office all the folks are runnin' in, an' what with the passin' an' the postal-cards she can pretty well keep the run o' what's goin' on. B'sides, she does hate housework wuss'n pisen, alwuz did. So it did seem jest a clear Providence for Emeline, an' she went.

Wal, you might know that was jest the time I had to go an' trip up over the mop-pail and break my leg. I wouldn't 'a' minded so much if I'd 'a' fell out of a second-story winder or down the suller-stairs, but it does seem sorter small potaters to break your leg over a mop-pail.

Howsumever, there I was tied right down onto a chair for months. I was mad enough to bite.

But, lawsy me, there was nuthin' for it but to get hired help tho' good hired help is skurser than hen's teeth in these parts an' everywheres else, I guess, by what you read in the papers. Providence, though, seemed to be on our side, for 'twa'n't very long before we got hold o' Ida Bell Blossom—the Widder Em's gal. She was a-keepin' company with a young feller up Egypt way, but land alive—she was a takin' sort o' girl an' pretty as a picter, I will give in, an' she'd kep' company with lots o' fellers, so we didn't think much o' that—bein' green in the business, I might say.

Wal, Ida Bell was a nice girl—I don't ask for no better nurse be sh' 'oo she may. I wa'n't able then to sit up an' kinder look after things as I do now, but she kep' the house as neat as wax an' was real teachable an' folksy b'sides. I s'pose she wasted consid'able time a-prinkin', but that was nateral enough, an' mercy on us an' to us! Girls now'days can't do half as much work as I did when I was young, an' I don't expect it. But there, jest as we got real wonted to Ida Bell, didn't that young feller up Egypt way —I've forgot his name—was it Simpkins? Seems

's if it begun with an S or mebbe a T—Tompkins? No—'twa'n't Tompkins—wal, anyway, he was in a deepo somewheres, an' didn't he go an' git a raise to somewheres else up the state an' up an' want to marry Ida Bell right off an' take her with him. It come sorter sudden to her, an' I argufied with her all I could, even to offerin' her as high as two dollars an' a half a week an' all her keep, but all the time he was a-argufyin' on the other side o' the fence, an' land o' Goshen, you might jest as well set down in the way of a cow-catcher as in front o' the course o' true love when it does git to runnin' smooth.

So the young feller, his name was Wyman—I knew it begun somewhere towards the end o' the alphabet—he carried her off to his new deepo—had a pass all the way —— I expect that was one thing led Ida Bell to go. It made her feel so good to take her tower on a pass.

Ida Bell treated us real white though—I'll say that for her; before she went she got her sister Sally to come over an' take her place. That made another one to learn our ways to, an' she was full as pretty as Ida Bell—prettier, if anything, for she wa'n't so dark-complected, but she hadn't no beau at the time, an' still bein' sorter green, we felt quite safe.

But land! We hadn't counted on that boy that drives the grocery wagon —— Pretty soon after she got here, I noticed that it begun to take him longer an' longer to set the bundles down onto our kitchen table, an' bime by it took a full half hour, though I kep' a-hollerin' back an' forth to break it up as much as I could. I felt justified, for I knew she'd have lots more chances, an' I wanted to hang on to her for a spell myself. But law sakes, what could a poor lame old woman do agin a likely young groceryman, with blue eyes and a mustache—he a-bringin' of her hull pounds o' chocolate candy every once in a while —sometimes as often as once a week—if you'll believe it. I like hoarhound drops full better myself, an' I told him so, but it didn't seem to make no difference.

At first he used to come Wednesdays—said we was so fur an' so out o' the way that he couldn't come no oftener—but pretty soon 'twas Saturdays too—an' then our house seemed to git nearer an' nearer the village, an' right in the way to everywheres, so he'd drop in once or twice a day to ask if we didn't need a bar o' soap, or a jug o' molasses, or sumthin'.

By that time she'd got to ridin' down the road with him a piece, or else he'd bring her back from

the village—the horse a-meanderin' along as if he had weights tied onto all his feet, an' the lines a-hangin' down over the thills. The old wagon jolted so that I s'pose Tommy had to hold her onto the seat.

Anyhow, not bein' as blind as a bat, I saw that Sally's days with us was numbered, an' she bein' so lovesick that she didn't know a flat-iron from a fiddle-string, I didn't care much if they was. So at the last I sorter egged 'em on, for 'twas a real comfort when they was safely married off an' not spoonin' around under my nose no more.

The next was Sophy Moore—good-lookin' too—we seemed to run afoul o' that kind continooal—but she wouldn't own up to havin' no beau, an' said she didn't like men folks noways. So as the grocer's boy was married off—an', by the way, only comin' once a week—I did think I could sorter ketch my breath before I begun to send out my next weddin'-invites, as you might say. But there now, would you believe it? She only stayed six weeks, all told. Don't you never trust them light-complected folks with china-blue eyes an' that sickly, continooal smile. Her very weddin'-day was set when she come to us, an' she jest wanted to git enough money to buy her weddin'-bunnet an' a few other fixin's. It makes

me mad clear through jest to think of it. Don't say Sophy Moore to me! Ananias and Sapphiry Moore, say I, an' more too.

The only comfort I have is that I give her a good piece of my mind before she left—a sorter weddin'-present as you might say—an' 'twas the only one I did give her, too. I'd made the others real hansum ones—both on 'em—spoiled a good two-dollar bill to do it.

Wal, by that time we knew enough to fight shy o' good looks, so the next one we got was Lowizy Payne—she's a nice hullsome woman, Lowizy is, an' sensible as they make 'em, but, land alive, she won't never be hung for her beauty, as the sayin' goes—besides bein' some along in years. She was a good cook though, an' I'd orter 'a' remembered that men folks cares a sight more for their stummicks than for their eyes, any day. This time 'twas Joe John Peck, our hired man. He'd worked for us for years off an' on in hayin' an' harvestin' since Deacon Bassett died; an' when Lisha went into the post-office, Joe John seemed to be jest the one to hire to come up an' tend to the critters an' what little farmin' there was. Joe John was a genooine old bach', too—but, land, it turned out 'twas because he thought all the good cooks was married. He

let on as much to me after things got to movin'. An' I ruther think I should 'a' guessed it anyway, for Lowizy hadn't been in the house more'n a week before Joe John begun a-castin' of sheep's eyes at her, an' her cookin', good enough to begin with, seemed to improve from day to day. Lawsy me—I never was so pampered up in the way of eatin' in my life—an' that was the silver linin' to the cloud for us. 'Twas lucky for Lisha, though, that that cloud didn't have to be turned inside outwards very long. Lisha is a good provider—he takes it from his pa—but, land, we don't expect to run no Walled-off Castoria, like they tell on down to York, an' the expense was gittin' to be somethin' fearful. The only way I stopped Lowizy from killin' off all the old hens was by tellin' her that there wouldn't be nothin' left to lay eggs for cake, an', lucky enough, Joe John was very partial to cake. I s'pose it might 'a' gone on for years though, if Lisha could 'a' stood it, for Joe John was gittin' well fed an' not payin' no grocery-bills neither. But jest then his uncle over to Warren died an' left him a farm. So he had to brace up an' ask Lowizy, an' they was married three months ago right here in this settin'-room. My fore room ain't been open for years except for cleanin',

an' I didn't feel called on to resk fadin' that carpet for no hired help, nice as they was. I did real well by 'em though, for I hated like a dog to have Lowizy go—an' we missed Joe John, too. I let Lowizy cook herself a first-rate weddin'-supper an' asked the minister an' his wife to stay to it, an' I give her a real good rag-carpet I had up-garret an' a bran' new log-cabin bed-quilt I'd pieced since I'd been laid up.

It didn't reelly seem worth while to me to bother with breakin' in any more hired help, but Lisha an' Emeline wouldn't have it no other way, so I give in an' let 'em hunt one up. "A burnt child," though, "dreads the fire," an' the very day of Lowizy's weddin' I begun a drawin' in a rug to have on hand for the next one's settin' out, *trossoo* they call it now'days.

It took some scourin' to git her, for we'd pretty well run the gamut around our part of the country, but finally we landed the Widder Bill Jinkins. She didn't seem what you'd call a reel likely candidate for the married sphere, bein' humbly as a hedge fence an' walkin' with a limp an' no kind of a cook besides, but I didn't bank none on them things, jest bein' a widder is so kinder takin' somehow, an' I kep' on stiddy with that rag rug.

I was workin' on it one afternoon when Elder Pease's wife come in to pass the time o' day an' fetch me some pink an' blue caliker rags to draw in. I started off I remember a-tellin' her about a piece I'd read in my *Zion's Trumpet* about how old folks hadn't orter lay back on their oars an' git in a rut, but keep on a-puttin' their shoulders to the wheel, an' I was wonderin' what stent I'd find basted out for me, now I was up an' 'round again, for I'd set still so long that I knew the hull neighbourhood had likely gone to rack an' ruin.

Then I switched off onter our troubles an' worriments over the Widder Bill Jinkins, for we'd jest hern tell that a widower from up Callicut way had got his eye on her, though we hadn't seen hide nor hair of him yet.

Land, I can eenymost recollect the very words I was a-sayin' to her.

"We're doin' the best we can, though," says I. "Emeline spreads it abroad down to the post-office what a fearful temper the Widder Bill has, an' how she can't cook a mite, an' I talk, too, as much as I dast with her right out in the kitchen most o' the time. An' Lisha, he's done his part, for he's put barbed wire all around the back fence, an' he says he's goin' to buy a bulldog an' set up a sign, 'No Trespassin',' on the gate-

post. But, land alive, 'twon't probably do no good—widders are so takin'."

An' if you'll believe it, that very minute I happened to look down the lane, an' I hollered right out.

"Dear me, suz a day, Mis' Pease! Run to the winder quick an' tell me. Be my eyes a-deceivin' of me or is it—yes, it is—the Widder Bill Jinkins a-comin' back from the village with a *man!*

"Wal, I'll be buttered if I ain't a-goin' to give up housekeepin' an' turn all my mind onto runnin' one o' these here Matrimony Bureaus."

No sooner had them words passed my lips than I recognized my Big Idee. "Minervy!" says I, kinder gaspin' for breath.

Mis' Pease, I s'pose, thought 'twas some new kinder swear word, for she turned around all kinder primmed up.

"What did you say, Mis' Bassett?" says she.

But land o' mercy, don't you think for a minute that I explained nothin'. I've lived too long in this world not to know that many a good idee's caught cold an' died from bein' aired too soon.

"What on earth does he look like?" says I, to throw her off the track—"most like a widower

or an old bach should you say, Mis' Pease? I hain't got on my fur off specs to-day."

"Widower," says she mournful, after studyin' of 'em for a spell. "I hate to say it, for your sake, Mis' Bassett, but he has the widower cut to his jib if ever I see one." An' then she turned to an' tried her best to comfort me up. I wa'n't ungrateful, but land, her words passed right in one ear an' out the other while I set there a-drawin' in pink and blue rags like one possessed —my mind was so took up with that new idee o' mine.

Even after supper, when the Widder Bill come in to tell me it was the Callicut man, I kep' as calm as a marble topped table. She said she'd stay till we got other help, but I jest smiled at her serene an' cool.

"You needn't to bother," says I; "my granddarter, Hitty May, is comin' down from Pride's Crossin' a-visitin' to-morrer an' I've been up an' around for quite a spell now. We'll manage all right. Here's your weddin' present," says I, handin' her the rag rug, "but you'll have to flax around an' finish it yourself. I've got other fish to fry."

II

MY SQUASH PIE

THE more I thought over that idee, the clearer I see that that was the stent Providence had laid in my work basket. Except for my hired help that summer, matrimony hadn't seemed to be stylish in Hicksville Center for a number o' years an' they was all kinds o' timber settin' round handy for me to tinker up my Bureau out of. Some seemed to have stuck on the shallers o' courtin', some had lost one mate an' never shipped another, but most on 'em hadn't never left port at all an' 'twas plain as a pike staff that they never would unless somebody took hold an' la'nched 'em.

Everything seemed to p'int straight to me for that job too, for I'm well known as a firm believer in the married state. Firstly, as Elder Pease an' Scripter says, 'tain't good for man to be alone an' a married man never is, that's sure. An' secondly, I don't hold with shirkin' a single one of the trials that Providence has laid out for us. We hadn't none of us orter expect to live in

peace an' be carried to heaven in a hand basket an' I didn't see why Hicksville Center folks should be spared any more'n the rest o' the world.

An' then, too, there's no denyin' that 'tis kinder pleasant an' sociable to have a companion to home to worry over an' do for an' confisticate with. Even news ain't half so newsy, someway, unless you've got somebody to mull it over with an' argufy an' "wanter know."

'Tain't everybody, though, that's as broad-minded as I be, an' I see full well that I'd got to go about my task sly, as sly as a cat, else somebody'd up an' say I was too forthputtin' an' meddlesome, an' then the fat *would* be in the fire. Folks is contrairy enough, goodness knows, but jest let 'em once suspicion that they're bein' done good to an' they'll beat the Old Boy himself for pig-headedness. More'n that, I didn't know jest where to begin, there seemed to be so many handles to ketch hold of. When in doubt, though, I've always found proverbs a great help —not the Scripter ones, you know, but Poor Richard's kind; jest run 'em over in your mind till you find one that fills the bill. Says I to myself: "'Barkin' dogs never bite.' I'm plannin' about folks, not critters. 'A stitch in time saves nine.' That's as much as to say: git right to

work. 'Charity begins to home,'" an' there it was. I must 'a' been as blind as a bat not to 'a' seen it before. Hitty May had been to our folkses full three weeks an' no sign of a beau yet!

Emeline said every letter she'd had had been from her ma or else in a girl's handwritin', an' though she'd had sights o' them picter post-cards, no two on 'em had come from the same feller unless mebbe "Bill" was also "B. C.," an' the writin' seemed diff'runt.

Still, I believe in makin' perfectly sure, so I hollered to Hitty May to come right into the settin'-room.

"Hitty May," says I, pokin' my specs onto my forrud so I could see good, "have you got a beau up home?"

"No, grandma," says she, reddin' up like a piny, "not jest now."

"So much the better," says I. "Then there won't be nobody to object if you git one in Hicksville Center."

She wanted to hear more, I could see, but I ain't never one to encourage curiosity in other folkses business. "You can go back now," I says, "an' finish your dishes. I've got to fry some fish." That was a figger o' speech, o'

course, 'cause I was reelly knittin' Lisha a pair o' wool socks, but I wanted to be left alone to git my brains to workin'.

As a result o' them cogituations, as they say, I got up a party to go over to Typhoon Cattle Show. They was our folks, o' course, an' Brother Hiram J. an' his folks, an' Tryphosy Thurston; she ain't got no folks, but it's partly her own fault, so I kinder included her for a warnin' to Hitty May, an' then I settled on Elnathan Skinner on account of his son Bub.

Bub Skinner is a long, lanky chap with a cast in his eye, an' bashful as they make 'em, but he's so good-natured he's eenymost foolish, an' he has A No. 1 prospects when his pa dies an' leaves him the farm. An' there, now, you can't be too choosy when you're marryin' folks off, neither yourself nor nobody else. I often think of A'nt Zilphy Gorman. She had a little, high, squeaky voice, an' she used to shake her head an' say: "I know full well that Andrew Gorman ain't the smartest man that ever was, but he was the best I could do." So I guessed Bub was the best I could do for Hitty May jest then, an' he did have the brace to ask her to ride over in his buggy so I felt I'd started proper.

Emeline's father, Si Bartlett, had come to

make his home with us for the winter—he'd been visitin' around amongst his children ever since his wife died—an' I got him to rig up seats in the old milk wagon to take the rest on us over. Land, I felt as if I was goin' to school again in that old school-wagon 't pa used to run. I sort of expected Hime an' Nate to git to pickin' at each other, the way they used to, or to go to throwin' spit-balls at Sarah Ann an' me, or to put their feet in the dinner kittle an' spoil the squash pie. An' that would 'a' been a loss sure enough, as it turned out, though, land knows, I never thought of such a thing when I put it in.

Si's horses they went along pretty smart, though they ain't so handsome as they might be—not by a long shot—won't never be hung for their looks—though, for that matter, neither will Si; them Bartletts' faces always did look like the edge of the Stater Maine—way it's down on the map. I s'pose, though, that ain't neither here nor there, seeing that the p'int is that we got to Cattle Show good an' early, afore they'd gin out any of their prizes or Reward o' Merit cards.

Wal, the men folks all went off 'long o' Si to see about puttin' the horses up somewhere, an' so we women folks started right off to see the women's work. I always do like to see what

lookin' things some women will have the face to bring to a fair, and put on show for all the other women to see. This time, though, there was some real good-lookin' things, though some others on 'em did make you as sick as if you was goin' round Pint Judy Pint in a schooner. Wal, the first thing my eye lit onto was a great blazin' star bedquilt. It was handsome, I will give in. It must 'a' took sights an' sights of gumption, as well as yaller cloth, to figure that out, an' it must 'a' made the stars in the heaven above feel meachin' to look down on it. Why, there ain't one on 'em could hold a candle to it!

Wal, as I was a-sayin', I was lookin' at that bedquilt an' tryin' to take the patron of it off so't I could make one like it for our best bedroom, when up stepped Hitty, an' punched me in the side, a good, strong punch, an' says she: "Grandma, do come over here an' look at these squash pies a-settin' up for prizes. Land," says she, "why, I wouldn't send such pies as them out to feed the pigs with. They'd say: 'Give us a squash, an' we could do better than that ourselves.'" Wal, with that, I went over to see them pies, though I did hate to leave that star bedquilt—an', lawsy me—they was a sickly lookin' set. "Wal," says I, "Hitty May, I do

presoom to say that that pie I brought over for our dinner is enough sight better-lookin' than any of these, if the men folks has kicked the kittle round all the way from the Center here." With that, up stepped a dapper-lookin' young feller that was walkin' around sort of lookin' out for things. "Excuse me, marm," says he, takin' off his hat with a great flourish of trumpets, "but I overhern what you jest said, an' if you've got any better-lookin' pie than these 'ere along with you, you'd better bring it in," says he, "for the judges are jest gittin' round to set on these pies."

"I brought that pie for our dinner," says I, "an' I dunno as 'twould improve it any to be set on by several men. It was all I could do to keep Lisha from trompin' all over it as we come along this morning."

The young feller laffed, an' said he guessed they wouldn't hurt it any, but I felt sorter dubersome; Hitty May, though—she kep' a-nudgin' me an' a-sayin', "Do, grandma, do! Oh, say, grandma, do"—till finally, ruther than be drove clean out of my seventeen senses, I give in. "Wal—all right," says I. "You run an' git it, Hitty May, an' 'f 'tain't all stove to flinders a-flouncin' around in that kittle, you can bring it to this man," an' with that I walked off, real un-

concerned, to look at the pickles an' jells. I wa'n't goin' to have that feller think I was set up any by puttin' my squash pie in Typhoon Cattle Show.

Bime by, Hitty May came runnin' up to me all nerved up. "It's in, grandma, it's in," says she, "an' it ain't spoiled a mite, an' it looks reel han'some." "Wal"—says I, cool as a cowcumber—"I guess it looks full as well as these Typhoon pies. Let's go and look at the garden sass." Over by the cabbage-heads we run across the rest o' the folks, an' I ain't the one to say there was anythin' cur'us in that. Then we went around an' saw all the rest of the things, an' the men folks got so sorter intrusted in some hoss-racin' that it was along quite late when we got round to go an' eat our vittles. On our way to the wagon, Si sorter hung back with the women folks, an' says he: "I'm in hopes you've brought one of them squash pies of yourn, Hepsey; I've got a hole in me big as a woodchuck, an' seems to me one of them would taste reel good." I was goin' to sort of pass it off, but Hitty May spoke right up: "Grandma put it in the show," sez she. I could 'a' slapped her with a good will.

Wal, you ought to 'a' heard the howdy do—all the men folks turned round an' pitched in—

they was a good rod ahead, but trust men folks for hearin' when you're talkin' about vittles an' sich. Land, you'd 'a' thought I was goin' to starve 'em to death and that I hadn't brought a single other thing to eat but that pie.

Wal—the upshot on it was that I finally give in an' promised to go back an' take my pie out, providin' them judges hadn't set on it an' made it more squash 'n it set out to be. So back we all trailed—Hitty May hated to like a dog, but I made her, for I felt as if she got us into all this fuss—I leadin' off an' the men folks taggin' on behind, to see that I didn't back out when I got there. I wanted to stop a minute when we got to that blazin' star quilt, but the men folks wouldn't hear of it; you'd 'a' thought they was about to starve right in their tracks. An' so we got to the row o' pies, an' there, right in the middle of 'em all, set my pie, marked full an' plain, "Mrs. Hepsey Bassett, Hicksville Center, First Prize." You could 'a' knocked me down with a feather, I was that beat, an' Hitty May, she looked for all the world as if she'd been made a queen, or president of our sewing circle. Even Bub yelled out: "Bully for you, Mis' Bassett! Bully for you," an' I could see that all the folks was impressed. So I turned around sort o' ma-

jestic-like, an' I says with a grain o' sarcasm: "Wal, I guess you won't get that pie for your dinner this time, after all your traipsin'." They didn't say nothin', but the men folks turned round pretty sudden an' travelled off towards the sheds. I sorter waited a minute jest to see how my name looked with "First Prize" tacked on to it, an' jest then up stepped that same young feller, smilin' as a basket o' chips, an' says he: "The judges didn't seem to spile your pie very much, did they? Of course they had to take one piece out to sample it."

"Wal"—says I—"I dunno as they did, an' I dunno as they didn't. I can't reelly blame 'em for takin' a small piece out for a sample, though if they was my men folks they wouldn't 'a' stopped off short of the hull thing. Why—they're out there now, mad as hornets to think they can't have that pie for dinner. You'd think they couldn't relish any other vittles at all." At that he sorter laffed, an' looked at Hitty May, an' then walked off an' talked to another man that was standin' near by. I took Hitty May by the arm an' walked her across to the bedquilts, for she's real sharp at takin' patrons, Hitty May is. We hadn't been there more'n two minutes when I felt somebody a-touchin' my arm, an' land

sakes ef there wa'n't that same spruce young feller again—smilin'er than ever—ef so could be—an' with my pie in his hand. He made a regular dancin'-school bow, an' stuck out that pie towards me, an' says he: "It seems a great pity that nobody should enjoy this delicious pie," says he, "an' if you're in a great hurry to go, why, I guess we can oblige you by lettin' you take your pie just a little early." An' then he made another great bow, an' handed me over a spick-an'-span new two-dollar bill, an' says he: "I'm real proud to present the prize to you, Mis' Bassett." I s'pose I'd orter 'a' smelled a rat right then an' there, for I'm old enough to know they don't take prize pies out of a show till the hull thing is over, but I was so flustered that I clean forgot all about Bub an' my Bureau an' everythin' an' asked that young feller to come along an' take dinner with us. That pie was a monster, an' I'd brought it jest for the men folks anyhow. He come fast enough, too, but bein' all wropped up in my squash pie, as you might say, I thought 'twas 'count o' that he follered along so willin'.

We found the rest o' the folks around the wagon, gittin' ready to eat the baked beans an' vittles the other women had brought. You'd orter seen Lisha laff. "Wal—if it don't take

"Sez he: 'I'm real proud to present the prize to you, Mis' Bassett.'"

ma," he says. "First—she takes the prize, an' then she makes 'em give her the pie back for dinner. That is the beateree!"

"It ain't hurt it any," says I—an' I guess it hadn't, by the way those men fell to on it an' cleaned up every crumb.

Then Si tackled up, an' we started for home, but not before all of us women folks had been down to the village an' laid out that whole two-dollar bill on good yaller caliker. An' Hitty May an' me, we went an' pieced a bedquilt that was as far beyond that Typhoon one as that was ahead of the stars in the firmament above, as Scripter says.

'Twa'n't very long though before I begun to wake up an' sense that it wa'n't headed for my north chamber arter all. First thing we knew that Typhoon feller was around here sellin' crayon enlargements, an' Hitty May wouldn't give me no peace till I had her grandpa enlarged, an' before you could hardly ketch your breath she was a-goin' to marry him come Christmas. They don't let no grass grow under their feet in Typhoon, I tell you, an' I respect 'em for that anyways.

The thing I can't quite decide is whether I made a success o' that first job of mine or not.

I guess I can resk it tho' for 'twas Hitty May I lotted on marryin' off an' not Bub Skinner, an' 'twas my Matrimony Bureau that Typhoon feller got aboard of, even if he did go an' climb up onto it himself.

III

MIRANDY'S CRAYON ENLARGEMENT

I WAS so kinder puffed up an' tickled with myself at gittin' a beau for Hitty May by jest turning my hand over, as you might say, that I couldn't keep it to myself. Lisha an' Emeline was too busy keepin' track o' the hull village to listen to my affairs, so I kinder opened up one day an' told Si Bartlett the hull thing, Matrimony Bureau an' all.

He didn't say nothin' for a spell an' then he shifted the straw he was a-chewin' over t'other side of his mouth an' says he, "Wal, that's a reel good idee, Hepsey, but I kinder feel as if 'twas too hefty a one to be wasted on the size of Hitty May. Beats me if you wouldn't 'a' found it a consarned sight harder chore to keep a little pink an' white posy like her from gittin' a beau than *versy versy*. A smart woman like you, Hepsey, could tackle a 'nough sight bigger job'n that."

That was a new light on the case to me, but there, I believe in runnin' up the shades o' my

mind for all the daylight that's goin'. My idees ain't like parlour carpets; they won't fade in streaks.

"Silas," says I, knittin' a time or two around, "I believe you've struck that nail squar' on the head. I did kinder feel as if I'd started to h'ist a barrel o' potaters an' had it turn out goose feathers. Kinder ketches you sudden."

Si laughed. "They's plenty o' taters in Hicksville Center," says he, "an' some bricks when it comes to h'istin' on 'em into matrimony. Have you thought of tacklin' any of them?"

"Who?" says I.

"Wal, there's Cynthy Simpscott an' Elvine Higgins an' Mirandy Peters an' the Spooner girls an' ——"

"No men?" snaps I. "Ain't there no men in your tater barrels?"

"They're the bricks," says Si, a-chucklin', "that is, some on 'em is; Ezry Porter, for instance, an' Zeke Ashley an' Elnathan Skinner an' Philander Spooner an' etcetry."

"Two o' them's widowers," says I, "an' as such more likely to be goose feathers than bricks. Polly Ann Spooner hain't been dead more'n a year yet but I expect Philander's begun a-lookin' around already."

Bein's Si's a widower himself, this was kind of a dig, but I wa'n't thinkin' of nobody's feelin's just then. I was jest statin' cold facts. Si, tho', hastened to git the conversation back onto women folks where he felt safer.

"Wal," says he, "which one of them women are you goin' to tackle this time? Elvine Higgins or Mirandy Peters now? They're both on 'em good hard nuts to crack."

"I begun on Mirandy Peters weeks an' weeks ago while I was laid up," says I. It popped out afore I realized what I was sayin'. I hadn't no intention of deceivin' Si, but he kind of riled me up, an' I was bound to say somethin'.

"What under the canopy?" says he, forgettin' to chew his straw.

"Don't you recollect," says I, "that old Dr. Mosher give Mirandy up an' said she was goin' into a decline, an' wa'n't I the one that sent her off down to her cousin's in Necropolis to visit, an' told her to go right away to see Silas Warner—my a'nt's second husband's nephew that keeps a drug store there? What more could I do then?"

"Hepsey," says Si, "if you ain't the beatinest woman in two counties. I've always said you was smart as a steel trap."

Mebbe I am, an' mebbe I ain't. Anyways I knew enough to shut right up on that last remark. All I'd said was true as preachin', but land I hadn't no more idee of a Matrimony Bureau than I had of a gold bedstead, when I sent Mirandy to Silas Warner. 'Twas jest because he's such a kind-hearted, well-meanin' little man an' I was reel worried about Mirandy. You see I knew, though wild horses couldn't 'a' dragged it outer me, that her decline was all on account of a disapp'intment. 'Twas Squire Ezry Porter that done it too—the best catch he is in Hicksville Center—havin' the biggest farm anywhere around. I didn't blame her for bein' disapp'inted.

He'd been goin' with her the summer before while I was away to camp-meetin'. He'd walked home with her from prayer-meetin' several nights an' fetched her a peck o' Summer Sweets one time an' a head o' cabbage another, but all so sly that none o' the neighbours knew it. Finally he asked her to have her picter took for him, so she went over to Typhoon on a special trip, an' had it took, three dollars a dozen they was, an' she had to take six. You can see how much she thought of him. An', o' course, she s'posed she knew what he meant, or what he ought to if

he was an honourable man. Whether he got scared or what, I dunno. Anyway, he never come near her again to get his picter, nor nothin'.

O' course, she worried over it. Some over the expense an' more over the mortification, till she got all down sick. Dr. Mosher couldn't find out what was the matter, so he called it a decline, like A'nt Maria Hickses, an' 'twas then I sent her off to visit at her cousin's in Necropolis, but o' course I couldn't tell all that to anybody, even if I'd wanted to, which I'm free to confess I didn't.

Wal, it seemed kinder uncanny, but it happened jest as it often will that 'twas the very day I was talkin' to Si that the news about Mirandy struck Hicksville Center. I knew somethin' was in the wind when I see Emeline scuttlin' up the lane twenty minutes early for dinner. Emeline with a piece of news is like a teakettle under full headway—plug it up an' 'twould bust all over the kitchen.

"Ma Bassett," she called from the back stoop, "have you hern tell about Mirandy Peters?"

"No, I hain't, Emeline," says I, "but I'm goin' to pretty soon unless your looks belies you. Is she dead, poor soul?"

"Poor soul! Your grandmother!" says Emeline. "She's gone an' got to be a celebrity, Ma Bassett. Look at that!" An' she spread out one of them patent-medicine almanacs, an' there on the very front page was Mirandy Peterses picter.

I dunno as I'd 'a' recognized her, for she had that same mad, stiff look all them celebrities has, but there alongside was her testimonial:

"Six weeks ago I was headed straight for the gates of Death, with every organ in me in the wrong place and agonies unspeakable racking my frame. Now my insides are all straightened out and I'm painless as an angel and I owe it all to Rogers' Rejuvenating Remedy. I shall never live happy again without at least two bottles of that wonderful panacea on my pantry shelf.

"With fervent gratitude to you and the Heavenly Powers, MISS MIRANDA PETERS."

"For the land sakes," says I, settin' right down on top of the cat, "I never was so beat. An' to think we lived neighbour to her all these years an' never suspicioned she was anything out of the ordinary. We've been favoured, Emeline, sure enough. Where did that almanac come from?"

"They come," says Emeline, "by the cart load as you might say in this mornin's mail. I was to give 'em out to every man, woman, an'

child that come in; an' I done it. I even sent word to all the folks that I thought was in danger of missin' 'em an' I've had pretty nigh the hull town on my hands. Life in a post-office is always excitin', but this was the most intrustin' mornin' I've had in all my born days. That office was like Bedlam let loose. I'd never 'a' got home now if they hadn't run out. We put off sortin' the rest of the mail till afternoon, so't we could mull it over with all the folks as they come in. I dunno what's happenin' to Lisha this minute; some folks that didn't get 'em was so mad they was eenymost ready to tear him limb from limb. I left Squire Ezry Porter there jawin' away like a house afire about how much taxes he paid an' his political influence an' etcetry, so I run away with this one for fear't Lisha would cave in an' give it to him."

"Didn't Ezry Porter git one?" says I. "Wal, ain't that a visitation o' Providence? 'Be sure your sins will find you out.' An' yet I'd 'a' liked first rate for him to seen it though."

"Oh, he seen it all right. That's what made him the maddest; Elnathan Skinner was crowin' so over lendin' him hisn."

"When's she comin' home?" says I.

"Mercy me, Ma Bassett, in all the excitement,

I clean forgot the postal that her cousin, Polly Peters, got last night sayin' she was comin' home day after to-morrer. I'll help you with the dinner, ma. I'd orter git right back down to the office."

La, now, ain't it a clear Providence that Lisha got to be postmaster? I don't believe there's another livin' soul that would 'a' took the clear comfort outer that office that Emeline does. She couldn't hardly sit still long enough to eat her vittles the next two days an' land o' Goshen I didn't blame her, for the town was in more of a buzz than it had been since war times. Everybody that could walk an' talk was discussin' Mirandy an' the almanac till you couldn't rest. The few that got left was mad as hops, but that didn't prevent 'em from going to their neighbours' to borrow the almanac an' then pickin' flaws in Mirandy's testimonial an' runnin' down her various features as depicted in the photograph. Some said she never was reel right down sick anyway, but the hull town was down hangin' around the post-office an' the grocery store the night she was expected home, an' everybody was glad enough to step out an' shake hands an' inquire after her health. An' the next week she was elected president of the sewin'

circle an' invited out every single night to tea. Such a run of popularity was never known in Hicksville Center; an' Elnathan Skinner an' Himie Bennett begun a-settin' up with her reg'lar.

That didn't look very much like a job for a Matrimony Bureau, did it? But land—how true 'tis that you never can tell from the looks of a toad how far he can jump! It was Mirandy Peters that come over an' jined it unbeknownst to herself.

We was talkin', I remember, about her testimonial.

"Land o' Goshen, Mirandy," says I, "I never knew your innards was in sech an awful state."

"Neither did I," says she, speakin' in an awed kind of tone, "but that's what the agent told me was likely the matter. He was down to Necropolis when I was there an' Mr. Warner told him about my wonderful recovery an' had me come down to the drug store to see him. An', Hepsey, he certainly knew more about the human frame than any other mortal I ever met with. I thought them pains I'd had was dyspepsy, likely, but no, he said 'twas my heart thumpin' aginst my backbone an' my liver sailin' round where my lights ort to be. Truly,

as Elder Pease says, 'We are fearfully and wonderfully made.' "

"'Tain't Elder Pease," says I; "that's Scripter. Now that you're president of the sewin' circle you'll be called on to expose Scripter like as not an' you must always be prepared. Does havin' a disapp'intment always jounce you up like that?"

"Havin' a what?" says she.

"Why, a disapp'intment," says I, "in marriage, Mirandy. You ain't forgot what give you your decline, have you?"

Mirandy fixed her eyes on me, dreamy like.

"Marriage hain't to me what it once was, Hepsey," says she. "Now I've got to be a celebrity, I dunno as I'd orter cramp my personality down onto one man. An' yet—wal, mebbe I'd orter make somebody happy. Fame they say gits kinder lonesome after a spell."

"Have you anybody special in mind?" says I.

"Wal," says she, "o' course there's Elnathan Skinner an' Himie Bennett. They'd either of 'em pop the question any minute. But, Hepsey, I'd kinder like to bring Ezry Porter to the p'int."

"Oh," says I, "so you'd still like to marry the squire?"

Mirandy's face changed all of a sudden.

"Hepsey," says she, "I'd like to git even with Ezry Porter. I'd like to bring him to the p'int an' then marry somebody else, jest to show him."

I looked shocked o' course as I'd ort to, but land, in my heart, I dunno as I reelly blamed her. Still o' course principle is principle an' I *looked* shocked. Then I lowered my voice. "Mirandy," says I, "the best way to get even with Ezry Porter or any other man is to marry 'em."

"Hepsey, you ain't talkin' straight," says she, "you mean not to."

"I mean *to*," says I, quiet but firm. "I was a married woman before you was born, Mirandy, an' I know what I'm talkin' about. They's opportunities in matrimony you won't find anywheres else. If you want to get even with Ezry Porter, marry him."

Mirandy looked unconvinced, but there—how should she know? Besides she wanted help.

"Wal, anyway," says she, "how can I git him up to the p'int in a hurry?"

Another of them Minervys popped outer my forrud all of a sudden. "Git enlarged," says I.

Mirandy jumped. "I'm as large as I want

to be now," says she. "'Rogers' Rejuvenatin' Remedy brings back the hue of health to the withered cheek an' restores to the limbs the plump an' graceful contours of youth.' "

"Mebbe," says I, refrainin' from looking Mirandy over careful, "but I wa'n't talkin' about you yourself, 'twas about them cabinet picters you had took. Hitty May's beau is comin' up this afternoon to stay over Sunday an' I'll bring him over to-night to talk to you about it."

Roscoe Conklin' Perkins is as tonguey a young chap as you'll find in a long summer's day, if he is my granddarter's young man, an' it didn't take him many minutes to nail Mirandy's enlargin' job, I tell you. An' bein's she was a friend of ourn an' a celebrity to boot he jest spread himself in the makin' of it too. We've had several enlargements to the Center. Roscoe Conklin' is clear percussion an' besides we always mean to keep right up to the times. Everybody that comes here speaks of it. But I never did see such a elegant one as Mirandy's. It was coloured up perfectly beautiful, an' Roscoe Conklin' had thrown in gratis a white lace ruffle down the front of her blue waist an' a pink tie with a gold neck chain. It was handsome.

I knew 'twould cause talk for o' course 'tain't

customary for folks to have themselves enlarged —they usually leave that for their relations to do when they're dead an' gone. But mercy me, I never reelized how much of a howdy do 'twould stir up. Everybody wanted to know what she was goin' to do with it. Some thought it orter be hung in the town hall an' others thought the deestrict orter buy it for the schoolhouse, an' then a party come up that thought Mirandy orter raffle off her enlargement, an' give the proceeds to the circle. They said somebody in Typhoon done that with a grocery bill o' Longfellow's they got hold of. An' the next Sunday Elder Pease preached a very movin' discourse on the text: "I will have neither part nor lot in this matter."

By that time the water seemed nigh enough to bilin' p'int to drop in our bag puddin', so Mirandy an' I put our heads together an' let it leak out through Emeline that she was intendin' to give it to her husband for a weddin' present.

That done the business all around jest as I foreseen. Elnathan Skinner come right around after mail time an' the door stun wa'n't hardly cold from his feet before Himie Bennett showed up to put in his bid—shut up the grocery store to do it. I was a-dustin' my what-not by the

winder that looks towards Mirandy's, so I seen both on 'em.

I dusted that what-not considerable that day off an' on an' bime by patience was rewarded. Jest at dusk Squire Ezry Porter rode up in his bran new horse an' buggy with his best Sunday go to meetin' hat an' watch-chain on. I was so nerved up I had to drop down in a rockin'-chair right where I stood, but land, it was pitch dark before he went an' I had to git up an' git supper.

I was jest finishin' the dishes when Mirandy walked in an' told me all about it. Squire Ezry —hat, watch-chain an' all—had finally braced up an' asked her right out in so many words. "So that hash is settled," says I. "Wal, I hope to the land you took him."

"Took him," says she. "Why, Hepsey Bassett, I told you ——"

"An' I told you," says I, "that that was the only way you'd ever git even with him. Besides I dunno as you'd orter slight Ezry, now he's come to the p'int man fashion, an' you think of all he's reelly done for you. Mebbe he was jest an instrument in the hand of Providence."

"Mebbe he was," says Mirandy, laughin' a little, "mebbe he was. 'Tain't for me to judge. But I've got to think the matter over well. That

crayon enlargement is far too costly not to go to the most deservin'."

Wal, of course all these doin's leaked out too —some way or other—same as such things always do. Even about an ordinary woman, such a romantic fact as that would have to get around, an', of course, with a celebrity like Mirandy, everybody reelly had a right to know. An' it certainly made sewin' circle an' missionary meetin' intrustin' for a spell, an' did much to help the cause, for so many came out to the tea meetin' at Mirandy's that enough red-flannel petticoats was turned off that one afternoon to last the heathen several seasons. Then everybody began to take sides; some was for Squire Porter an' some for Elnathan, an' some others for Himie Bennett. Three beaux, think of it, at her age, an' a woman that hadn't had a beau before in twenty years! Wonderful, truly, are the workin's of Providence and Rogers' Rejuvenatin' Remedy!

Prayer-meetin's got to be the most exciting occasions of the week, for one of Mirandy's beaux was sure to be there to see her home, an' we was always full of interest to see which 'twould be an' what he'd say—tho' 'twas always the same thing.

Elnathan would kinder sidle up, with a little cough, an' say: "I happen to be goin' your way to-night, Miss Mirandy, hm, hm! If you ain't no objections, I'll jest step along with you."

Himie Bennett, he'd come up with a pompous bow. "May I have the honour an' pleasure, Miss Peters, of escortin' you to your domiciliary residence?"

But Ezry Porter—he didn't feel any need of askin', I tell you. "Wal, Mirandy," he'd say, laughin', "I guess it's about time I went up again to look after my parlour ornaments. Is the gilt wearin' off the frame?"

They took turns pretty well, usually, but one night they all stepped up at once. It was most excitin'! But, bein' a celebrity, things come easy to Mirandy.

"Hepsey is goin' up our way, too," says she, "an' Cousin Polly Peters, so we'll all go along together."

We all kind of strung across the road so that nobody would walk with nobody else in special, but when we got to the house Mirandy unlocked the front door an' went in first to light the lamp. Suddenly we heard her scream, an' we all rushed into the front room.

"It's gone!" she cried.

An', sure enough, it was. Nothin' but wall paper over the front room tete ; not even a picter cord left to tell the tale of the crayon enlargement.

Squire Ezry come forrad with all the majesty of the law.

"Lock the doors an' winders," says he, "an' let no man or woman leave this house without bein' thoroughly searched."

The crayon enlargement was at least three feet square, so it wasn't jest likely that we had it in our pockets, but it sounded reel well, an' as if Ezry was doin' somethin'.

At any rate, we give the house a good searchin' from attic to cellar, an' then we all gathered in the front room again.

Mirandy cleared her throat.

"Ladies an' gentlemen," says she. In spite of her fame, her voice quavered as if she was speakin' in prayer-meetin'. "Ladies an' gentlemen, some of you have thought I was a little slow in makin' up my mind. Let this settle it right here an' now. If any of you can bring back my crayon enlargement safe an' sound by next Wednesday noon, I'll marry him on the spot. I'll ask the elder an' all of you here to dinner that day so as he can do it."

Wal, talk about hue an' cry ! By nine o'clock next mornin' everybody in the village knew about it, an' by twelve everybody was in the pay of one of those three men, an' pledged to hunt for him. It wa'n't so much Mirandy, all three explained, but they'd all got their dander up, an' hated to be beat.

Ezry Porter, though, didn't seem to spend much time huntin'. Thursday mornin' he took the train for somewhere, an' Tuesday he went again. We didn't know what to make of it.

Mirandy was the coolest person in the village. She cooked up for her dinner party, an' fixed over her best black silk, an' trimmed herself a new bunnet, though she didn't need one more than a cat needs two tails. But I couldn't get a word out of her except that she didn't worry none, she guessed the picter would turn up, all right, an' she'd be glad not to have to settle anythin'.

Wednesday noon was the biggest time this village ever saw. Them that wasn't in the house by invitation was out in the road or the front yard of their own free will, an' Himie an' Elnathan looked as if they'd as soon have walked up an Indian ga'ntlet as that line of their friends an' neighbours.

Ezry didn't mind, though. He bowed an' smiled right an' left.

"Wait a little while, neighbours," says he, an' came into the house as smilin' as a basket of chips.

"Wal, Mirandy," says he, takin' off his tall hat, "shall we get married now or have dinner first?"

Any other woman in the Center would 'a' said "Married," but that jest shows the difference. "Dinner," says Mirandy, an' we all sat down.

About ten minutes later we hern a wagon come jest peltin' up the road an' stop outside; an' I dunno which got to the door first, Ezry or Mirandy; they both fairly ran. The rest of us was only a second later, an' there we see a nice top buggy with Rogers' Rejuvenatin' Remedy in big gold letters around the body of it, an' a neat lap robe marked, "Silas Warner, Drugs, Necropolis." Underneath that lap robe was my a'nt's second husband's nephew!

He jumped out of the buggy, an' took out a big, square parcel. Mirandy run down the walk to meet him.

"Want to swap?" says he, shakin' her hand good an' hard. "I've got a handsome picter here," says he, "that I'll trade off for the original, which is handsomer."

An' up the path they come together, laughin'

like two children, an' holdin' Mirandy's crayon enlargement between 'em.

Ezry Porter fairly jumped off the door stone.

"You can't do it," he yelled. "It ain't the right one at all. I've got that, an' 'twill be here at one o'clock. I've been havin' the gilt frame touched up a little."

Mirandy turned on him.

"If there are two," says she, "I'm still at liberty to choose, an' I choose Silas. You've come too late for your picter."

Mirandy didn't say, "Dinner first" this time, I tell you. She tied on her new bunnet quick, an' stood right up, an' was made into Mis' Silas Warner.

Jest as we were settin' down again, another buggy come tearin' up, an' out jumped another man with another square parcel. Ezry tried to head him off, but we all heard him say: "Here's the picter, squire, all but the necktie an' the breastpin. I couldn't remember whether that was to be blue or pink, but we'll put it on later, an' change to the cheaper frame, as you said."

Ezry threw the picter down flat on top of Mirandy's best pi'ny, an' marched off out of the yard mad as a hatter, an' followed, as they say in books, "by the jeers of the populus."

"An' up the path they come together, laughin' like two children."

I guess that didn't spoil anybody's appetite. Cousin Polly had kept the dinner hot for us, an' we all went back an' ate twice as much for so much bobbin' up an' down.

I went up with Mirandy while she got her things on.

"Mirandy," says I, "what does all this mean? How did Silas git that picter?"

"Oh, Hepsey," says she, "don't be mad at me —will you? I wanted to tell you all the time but I dassent for I knew you wouldn't think 'twas right to uphold me an' I jest had to get even with Ezry Porter. Silas an' I have been correspondin' ever since I left Necropolis. We done it through my cousin Malviny down there, an' he planned the hull thing out for me. I left the back door key under the mat while we went to prayer-meetin' so that he could get in. He fixed things up for me with the Remedy folks, too, you know, an' he thought o' usin' the picter I'd had took for Ezry. You won't never breathe it to a soul, though, will you?"

"I never will, Mirandy," says I, "if you'll promise me never to let on to Si Bartlett that I wa'n't knowin' to it all the time."

IV

THE MEMORIAL PARTY

I'VE been readin' quite a lot in my *Zion's Trumpet* an' other papers lately about the time folks waste now'days on social doin's, an', land sakes, I'm gittin' worried over Hicksville Center. It's eenymost as bad as New York City, I'll bet. Why, the very next week after Mirandy Peterses weddin', didn't the Spooner girls go an' give their memorial party for Polly Ann! They called it her anniversary, but 'twa'n't reelly, for they couldn't git around to give the party till they'd got their pay for their fall sewin', an' Polly Ann had that allepath doctor up to Typhoon, had him off an' on for two years, wouldn't listen to nobody, an' she passed away in awful agony a year ago last Labour Day. I was jest smoothin' my hair an' puttin' on my bunnet in front of the settin'-room lookin' glass when Si Bartlett moseyed in an' set down in the red rocker.

"Hello, Hepsey," says he. "Where ye goin' in all your good clothes?"

Si knew as well as I did for he was comin' to

supper himself, but he thought 'twas cunnin' to pretend he'd forgot. You see the party was a sorter cross betwixt a funeral an' a sewin' circle, you might say, for the women folks went to the exercises an' the men folks was asked 'round for the eatin' part afterwards. Emeline would 'a' said—"Now, pa, don't you remember? Why, pa, be you losin' your mind?" an' tickled him most to death, but he didn't git no such satisfaction outer me.

"To Polly Ann Spooner's memorial party," says I matter of fact, smoothin' my bunnet strings.

"Sho now, Hepsey," says he, "I thought you was goin' out on one of them weddin' towers o' yourn. Hain't you goin' to marry anybody off this afternoon, Mary Marthy or Mary Magdalene now? Say, Hepsey, did you ever hear how them Spooner girls got them outlandish names?"

I couldn't answer for a minute for I was wettin' my finger to smooth my part, but then I turned right around an' looked at him good an' hard.

"Si Bartlett," says I, "I wonder at you callin' names out of the New Testament outlandish. I dunno, honest, what'll ever become of ye. Why, their ma had counted on a boy an' planned to name him Matthew Mark, an' when them girl

twins was born she said she was goin' to name 'em for the apostles anyway, whether or no. She was reel set in her ways, old Mis' Spooner was."

"Wal," says Si, "I ain't reelly consarned about old Mis' Spooner. She's dead an' gone to glory, years ago. What I want to know is whether you're lottin' on marryin' off the girls or Philander this afternoon."

"His wife's funeral party!" says I. "Hain't you no sense of respect at all, Si Bartlett? His mind will be all took up with Polly Ann."

Si chuckled in that aggravatin' way he has.

"Mebbe it will," says he, "mebbe it will, but my advice to you is, keep your eye on Philander."

I didn't stop to argufy with Si, firstly because I had my fears he was probbly right, and secondly because I was in a hurry to git started. I always believe in gittin' to the fore part of the commencement so's not to miss nothin' that's goin' on. Summer settin's never raised no spring chickens yet. An' I travelled right along as fast as I could an' got there at half-past one, along with A'nt Sophi' Pierce an' Elvine Higgins, which was plenty early, for our part wa'n't p'inted until regular funeral time, "two o'clock to the house."

The Spooner girls had opened up the fore room

an' the spare chamber, an' pinned up the paper shades half-way, even though the day was sunny an' several cracks o' light was let right in onto the best carpets. You could see that they meant to go the whole figger when they'd once set out. They all had on their good black alapackers that they wore to the reel funeral, an' their best false fronts, an' Loviny even had a set of new store teeth for the occasion. They looked reel well on her an' took fully two years offen her age. Loviny is goin' on forty-nine this year, I know, 'cause she was born the same year as Samuel Pearson, my brother that died; but the other girls hev alwuz babied her so that sometimes I ketch myself a-feelin' as if she wa'n't over forty-five or that matter, an' specially so with them air teeth. It did seem a pity 'twa'n't an occasion when she could smile more so's to sorter show 'em off. I saw her start to once or twice, but Mary Magdalene kep' a keen eye on her an' hunched her in the side good an' she sobered down sudden.

Wal, howsumever, the girls met us to the front door an' took us to the spare chamber to lay off our bunnets an' shawls, an' then down to the fore room, where there was chairs ranged round for the sewin' circle an' Elder Pease an' Deacon

Blodgett—Deacon Hiram, I mean, the one that leads the singin' to church. Pretty nigh the whole sewin' circle come, except one or two that was prevented by sickness or preservin', so a few that was late had to spill over into Mary Marthy's an' Loviny's bedrooms; but I was in such good season that I had the best rush-bottom rocker with a feather cushion, right out in the forefront o' the offendin', as you might say.

Wal, when we all got together except Delight Miller—she'll be late to her own funeral, I'll be bound—Elder Pease led us, as he says, to the Throne o' Grace. Elder Pease prides himself on his gift in prayer, an', land o' Goshen! I never knew him to be so newsy as he was that day. He reelly outdone himself. I follered him close, I tell you, an' I learned that the Thurstons had a new baby I hadn't hern tell a breath about. He didn't mention, though, whether 'twas boy or girl, called it an infant—an' I declare I forgot to ask afterwards. Then he prayed for a new fambly that had moved into the old Brightman place—their names is Haskins—cousin to Bill Peck's wife—an' he prayed for them that was likely any day to die of old age. That got me for a minute, an' I sorter let my mind wander till I figured it out that he meant Uncle Mose Williams, an' so I

missed his prayers for missions an' such, an' I did wanter know how they liked our last barril too; but I was right on deck again by the time he got round to Philander. He was a-settin' right in front o' the manteltry piece, which brought him right under an enlargement o' Polly Ann, another of Roscoe Conklin's jobs it was. They ordered it the minute they see Mirandy Peterses, an' as the Spooner girls is that poor but proud kind that won't let nobody have no better things than they do, they'd ordered even more extrys an' etcetrys than even Mirandy, paid good money for 'em, too. So he'd put gilt buttons up an' down the front o' Polly Ann's bask waist, an' a red necktie onto her neck sot off by an elegant great cameo breastpin, an' a long gold watch-chain, tho' goodness knows Polly Ann never so much as thought of havin' a watch. But, land, she did look fixy an' dressy, an' bein' as nobody was fooled we can't begretch Polly Ann a few airs now she's dead an' gone.

Wal, as I said, there sot Philander right in front o' the manteltry piece. He kep' his hat on all the time so's to show the weed he had on it. It was higher'n his hat if anythin'—sorter stood up around the top like a paper collar. Wal, the Elder prayed for Philander up hill an' down

dale. He fairly wrastled in prayer for the mournin' relick that he might be comforted an' consoled, an' hasten on to meet his beloved spouse on the other side o' Jordan in white robes an' the palms o' their hands. It was beautiful to hear him. He wrastled so hard that the perspiration stood out in great drops on his forrud, an' he sunk into a chair clean beat out.

Then Deacon Blodgett he squeaked around in his Sunday shoes an' passed the meetin'-house singin'-books outen a grape-basket, an' we all set there an' sung all the hymns she had to her funeral—"Sister she was mild an' lovely," an' "Hark from the tombs," an' the whole kit an' caboodle of 'em. It was reel impressive.

A'nt Sophi' Pierce got up next. She read a paper all about Polly Ann's life—jest like an obituary—when she was born an' married an' all, an' when she become a professor an' joined the church, an' her receipt for quince jell an' soft soap, an' what she died of, an' the number o' kinds o' patchwork she' d made, an' wound up with her fav'rite piece o' po'try.

The girls felt obliged to ask A'nt Sophi' 'cause she was president o' the sewin' circle when Polly Ann died, but she ain't no scholard, an' she did mix it up fearful, an' read so sorter queer that

we didn't reelly ketch what she died on, an' it sounded as if 'twas the soft soap. She left out, too, what doctor she had, an' what was the text o' the sermon, an' that was a dretful slip, I must confess.

Still, nobody thought o' that when they hern the poem. I ain't much on po'try as a general rule, though I s'pose it's all very well for them as can't relish good common sense, but Elvine Higgins, she's got the genooine gift. Words seems to roll right outer her mouth like water off a duck's back. Land, I wisht I could remember it all. It come out in the *Gazette* the next week, an' I cut it out an' kep' it. I alwuz do keep Elvine's pieces an' put 'em in the back o' my Bible along with the obituaries. Less see, it begun

> " 'Twas jest about a year ago
> When Polly Ann was laid under the snow."

'Course there wa'n't no snow, bein's 'twas September, but Elvine explained to me that she had to have it on account of *ago*. She said there was poets, Shakespeare an' such, that was so slack that they go right ahead an' write whether it rhymed or not, but she's got to have the words sound alike or her conscience wouldn't let her pass it off for po'try, an' I agreed with her.

Wal, she went on to tell about Polly Ann's life ag'in—how she went to school an' then—I wisht I could repeat that. Less see how it goes:

"At the age of eighteen she began to meander
Down the flowery pathway of love with Philander,
Who rejoiced also in the name of Spooner,
An' him she married the quicker the sooner."

Now don't that jest go good? I do wisht I could remember the hull piece. She named all the children an' rhymed 'em up first rate, Melindy, an' Philury, an' Josiah Reuben, an' all, tho' land only knows how she done it; an' told what they all died of. I can't remember no more, tho', till the end:

"She suffered much from erisypelas,
Till things was brought to such a pass,
She said: 'I'm tired o' bein' a Spooner,
I guess I'd be an angel sooner,'
So up she died an' was buried in church,
Leavin' poor Philander in the lurch."

With that I'll have to own that Elvine casted several sheep's eyes at Philander, an' my opinion is that he casted of 'em back at her, though the weed had come ondone by this time an' dropped so fur over one ear that I couldn't see his face—a-settin' as I did on his off side.

"Dear me, suz a day," thinksed I to myself,

rememberin' what Si Bartlett had said. "I do hope that won't make no match."

An' I decided right then an' there to turn my Matrimony Bureau wrong side foremost, as you might say, an' put a stop to any such works as that. Elvine of course was an old maid an' as such hadn't no call to be pickers an' choosers, but land sakes, when a woman can write po'try like that I for one respect her as much as if she was married, an' I felt that Philander wa'n't nigh good enough for her.

After that we sung another hymn, Polly Ann's fav'rite, I b'leeve they said:

> "Speak an' let your wants be known,
> For speakin' may relieve you."

I guess lettin' her wants be known was all the relief Polly Ann did have, for Philander is as clost as the bark on a tree. He made her be buried in her old brown caliker so's to save her good black alapacker in case he got married ag'in. I guess that's one reason the Spooner girls give the party, to wipe out the memory o' that brown caliker funeral. It was a comfort to me to see that the alapacker was fur too narrer-chested an' short-waisted for Elvine, besides strikin' her about the top of her gaiters. I measured her for

it with my eye when she stood up to read her piece.

After that, the girls took us up to the shed chamber, where they had a reg'lar cattle show of all the things Polly Ann had made. Over the rafters was her quilts, twenty-five diff'runt patrons—Polly Ann was a master hand at piecin' quilts—an' rag carpets, an' drawin'-in rugs, an' tidies, an' mats, an' feather flowers, an' etcetry. You never saw the beat. They'd borrowed of 'em back from all the relations she'd give 'em to for twenty year.

At the very end o' the room, on the parlour table, was the hansumest thing of all—Loviny had made it. 'Twas a memorial flower piece, an' the green leaves was all made of Polly Ann's green moreen she had the year she was married, an' the other leaves was her red necktie her cousin Sarah Maria give her, an' the blue with pink spots she bought with the egg money unbeknownst to Philander, an' then there was a yaller an' purple checked. I couldn't place where that come from, nor remember ever to have seen it. An' I wondered a sight about it, so I asked Mary Magdalene afterwards. She made me promise not to tell, but it was a gingham petticoat Polly Ann had once. It worked in so good that Loviny

felt justified in usin' of it, but it mus' be kep' of course, so don't you breathe it to a soul.

Wal, then there was tendrons that was locks of her hair, an', if you'll believe it, they had seed pods, too—three on 'em. They was her last pills that she never had time to take. Now, wa'n't that smart of Loviny? I never had an idee she had so much gumption in her.

By that time the men folks had begun to come, so we all went down to the kitchen an' eat supper. The girls certainly done well by us, though I s'pose they'll take in sewin' for weeks to pay for it. Beans an' brown bread, an' boiled eggs, an' ham, an' doughnuts, an' pickles, an' jells, an' three kinds o' cake, an' mince an' apple an' squash pie.

"Seemed most like a weddin' supper, didn't it?" says Si, as we started for home—the girls wouldn't let us stay an' wash the dishes. "Did Elvine read a piece?"

Then I see 'twa'n't no good for me to play off with him.

"Si Bartlett," says I, "I hope you ain't no prophet, but for a man you certainly air the noticin'est person I ever see in my born days. What signs has there been?"

"Oh, nothin' much," says he, "nothin' much.

I've jest happened to notice 'em with their heads together over this Memorial Party. Did it go off well, Hepsey?"

"Except for not havin' no corpse it was full as intrustin' as any funeral I've been to in years," says I, truthful. "An' I s'pose that'll all help along."

Si nodded. "An' yesterday," says he, "when I was up to the cemetery lookin' over the new Thurston monument, I ketched Elvine a-puttin' flowers on Polly Ann's grave."

"Oh, Si," says I, "that's an awful bad sign, but, bad or good, such works as that has got to be put a stop to, an' shall be, if my Matrimony Bureau is any manner of good."

Si chuckled in that aggravatin' way I spoke of.

"Kinder queer business for a Matrimony Bureau," says he; "seems if —— What ye got agin Elvine, Hepsey?"

"Elvine!" says I. "'Tain't Elvine! A poetess like that is fur too good to be laid out in brown caliker if I can help it."

"Wal, how ye goin' to hender it?" says Si. "If Elvine has reelly got her hooks into Philander you'll find it pretty tough sleddin' to git 'em out."

"Marry her off to somebody else," says I, cooler'n I felt.

Si jest stood still in his tracks an' hollered. "Whar'll ye find him?" says he. "Elvine's been over this township with a fine-tooth comb, herself, an' Philander is the fust chanst she's ketched sight of in many a long day."

I didn't answer him "Aye," "Yes," nor "No." I was doin' business jest then inside of my forrud, not down below it. I was sayin' over my proverbs jest as tight as I could go.

V

THE RESCUE OF ELVINE

THE next afternoon I tied on my white apron an' took my knittin' an' went over to set a while with Elvine Higgins. She come to the door with her hair all tousled up an' her fingers jest drippin' with ink.

"I'm writin' a poem," says she, kinder holdin' the door on the latch.

"Is that so?" says I, as cool as a cowcumber. "Wal, that's jest the time for me to come around, then. Nobody in this town cuts out your pieces any more reg'lar than I do. I'd admire to hear it." I ain't usually such a hand for taffy as all that, but I was bound to git on the right side of Elvine without fail.

She led the way into her settin'-room, where the table was all covered with pieces of paper, an' picked up one on 'em an' handed to me.

"It's Polly Ann Spooner's epitaph," says she. "I thought the Spooner girls would like it."

I heaved a sigh as I looked at it, all wrote out on letter sheet with a wreath of doves an'

flowers an' etcetry, done by Elvine in pen an' ink.

> "Here lieth she named Polly Ann,
> Who went to heaven and left her man.
> Oh, why did she so distant roam
> When heaven was right there to home?"

"It's beautiful," says I, handin' of it back, "most as beautiful as if 'twas true."

Elvine kinder bristled, same as my old gray cat does when Lisha pulls its tail.

"What do you mean, Mis' Bassett?" says she. "Ain't it heaven enough to be the wife of a good an' true an' noble man?"

"Likely as not," says I. "I thought you was writin' about Philander Spooner's wife, she that was a Perkins, but I see I was mistook. I had a letter from Mirandy Warner this mornin'," says I, drawin' out my knittin'. "Did you know't Ezry Porter went over to Necropolis last Sunday an' tried to collect the price of his enlargement offen Silas?"

"You don't say," says Elvine, forgettin' her huff. "Did he git it?"

"Wal, not much," says I. "Silas ain't no fool if he is mild spoken. I shouldn't never have favoured the match if he had been."

Elvine leaned forrad in her chair.

"Oh, Mis' Bassett," says she, "Emeline's father told me, only the other day, up in the cemetery, that you was at the bottom of the hull thing, about Mirandy an' her beaux. How in the world did you ever do it?"

I smiled, mysterious like. "Ask me no questions," says I, "an' I'll tell you no lies. Such things must be kep', Elvine."

"But Elnathan Skinner an' Squire Porter," says she. "Jest tell me that much, Mis' Bassett. How'd she ever bring them to the p'int? Was it the almanac?"

"Wal," says I, "mebbe I can tell you that much, Elvine, if you won't never breathe a breath to a soul. It wa'n't the almanac at the very last. It was her crayon enlargement done that."

"Mis' Bassett," says she, "is Hitty May's beau going to be here within the next few days? I'd been kinder thinkin' of bein' enlarged, myself."

I settled my specs on my nose good an' firm an' kind of looked Elvine over. She fixes her hair to look like Mis' Brownin' an' the rest of them poetesses, all hangin' down in strings to the sides, an' she's long featured an' skinny an' sallow complected to boot. "Elvine," says I,

"if I was you I don't think I'd be enlarged right off to onct, but I've got an idee that's worth two of that. The men folks here in Hicksville Center seems to be jest crazy now'days on the subject of a celebrity. Why don't you bring out a book of your po'try? I've got most enough pieces of yourn in the back of my Bible to make a book now, an' you could reel off a few more to fill up."

Elvine jest gasped at the size of the idee. "A book!" says she. "A book—a book!"

"Yes," says I, "a book. The new editor of the *Gazette* is Roscoe Conklin's cousin from Pikesburg an' I'll bet he'll do it reasonable."

"An' I could dedicate it to Philander Spooner," says Elvine, sorter dreamy like. "'Twould be kind of a delicate attention, now his wife's gone."

"Elvine," says I, fixin' my specs sternly on her, "don't you go to wastin' that dedication on Philander Spooner. When that book comes out, you can likely have your pick o' the hull village, or mebbe the county. You let me see to that dedication."

Wal, she finally promised to, but it come so kinder hard that I was all in a tiffick to git out of the house before she had a chance to think it

over an' draw back. Jest then, as luck would have it, I see Si Bartlett comin' down the road in his democrat wagon, so I made Elvine h'ist the winder an' holler to him to wait an' give me a lift. She hated like a dog to have me go so soon, I hadn't more'n got set, but I told her I'd got to spare my lame leg as much as I could so she had to part with me, tho' she follered me clear out to the team an' carried a chair for me to clamber up on, talkin' all the way.

"I'll go right to writin' of 'em," she sung out, as Si slapped the reins for the last time, "an' I'll be up to-morrer to show 'em to ye."

"What's that, Hepsey?" says he. "Is Elvine startin' to write her weddin' invites already? Who's the lucky man, as the sayin' goes?"

"The best they is in the Center," snaps I. "An' he's none too good for Elvine Higgins, neither."

"Dew tell," says Si, with that aggravatin' drawl of hisn. "Does he know it, yet?"

"Wal," says I, kinder hesitatin', "not exactly, but——"

Si give that chuckle that I never can stand. "I'll bet when he does he won't stop runnin' this side of Boston," says he.

I hadn't meant to tell Si a word about it, but

I see 'twas the only way to shut him up, so I la'nched forth into the hull story.

He was on the broad grin at first, but as I laid out the details about the book an' kinder soared high an' eloquent about Elvine's poetry, he sobered down considerable an' bime by he nodded his head two or three times when I stopped to ketch my breath.

"Hepsey," says he, "as I've said time an' again you air the beateree. Elvine Higgins as Elvine Higgins ain't as you might say in the market, but as a poetess an' the author of a book, I dunno; mebbe that's a horse of a diff'runt colour. Hicksville Center has kinder got its appetite up for celebrities now an' no mistake. But what about the dedication you spoke of an' who's your man?"

"Wal," says I, "Silas, this is my idee. Mebbe you've heard the sayin' that 'many a heart's been caught on the rebound.' That was the proverb that come to me last night. An', Silas, whose heart's a-reboundin' here in Hicksville Center right now? Ain't it Squire Ezry Porter's?"

Si give one long, low whistle, but he didn't say nothin', so I went on: "An' I don't s'pose there's nobody in Hicksville Center that's as

sharp set after celebrities as Squire Ezry. He's got money, you see, an' now he's lookin' for Fame, that's why he wanted Mirandy Peters. Now it's my idee to git hold of Ezry Porter as soon as I can an' tell him about the dedication. The book part I'll tell to Emeline in a day or two, an' I guess I won't have to hire no colume in the *Gazette* to git it spread abroad, but the dedication I'll keep secret—jest a-sayin' that Elvine ain't quite made up her mind about that. An' I dunno as it's quite right to Mirandy, but thar, I guess she'll forgive me if I hint to Squire Ezry that Mirandy'll kinder sing small when she sees that book of po'try lyin' on folkses parlour tables with her almanac only hung up in the kitchen. An' then I'll end up by sayin' that it's a pity Elvine ain't a married woman so she could make her husband famous too by havin' his name on the title-page an' in the dedication."

Si slammed his fist down on his knee. "Jumpin' Jehosaphat, Hepsey," says he, "Ezry Porter'll swaller that, line, hook an' sinker, or I miss my guess. I wouldn't 'a' s'posed no livin' woman could 'a' done the trick—Je-ru-sa-lem!"

"Sh," says I, for we was jest turnin' up the lane. "Don't you breathe a word of this to

Emeline, nor nobody else, for I don't want it to git to Ezry till I can hand it out to him right end foremost, myself."

"All right," says he; but land, if Emeline hadn't been all took up with some postal cards that Elder Pease's folks had sent 'em from furrin parts, she'd 'a' certainly smelt a rat, for Si set there on the broad grin, an' every few minutes he would slap his knee an' give me an awful wink around his *Weekly Ploughshare.*

"Land, pa," says she, onct, "I'll have to be a-readin' that *Ploughshare* o' yourn. I didn't know 'twas sech a funny noos sheet."

Si coughed. "'Tain't that that's so funny. I was jest thinkin' of somethin' Himie Bennett told me down in the store to-day."

"Wal, what was it, pa?" says she. "Ma Bassett an' I like a joke as well as the next one."

I see Si was in a corner, an' I was afeared Emeline would ferret the hull thing out of him someways if I didn't come to his rescue.

"Emeline," says I, as if I'd had a Minervy, "I'll bet them postals was from Mis' Pease's sister's husband's cousin up Terryton way. Seems to me her initials was S. G. Didn't she go to the Philippian Islands as a missionary?" That got

Emeline off on another tack, an' I cut for bed jest as soon as I could to git out of Si's way.

The next mornin', first thing, over comes Elvine, an' I had to send Si down to the village on an errand to git him out of the house so she could go to readin' me her pieces. They went good, I tell you; they was the nearest common sense of any po'try I'd ever heard. The best one was about a party a friend of hern had give for her daughter over to Typhoon, day boo they called it, tho', land, I don't know why they called it any such heathenish name; it sounded jest like any Christian party as fur as I could make out. I can't remember much of the poem, but part of it was about the family. It went some like this:

"Who helped Lou Pray give her day boo?
Her mother done what she could do.
Who was it paid the dollars and cents?
Her father footed the expense.
Who was it done what she was able?
Her little sister, Mary Mable.
Who was it come from furrin parts?
Miss Elvine Higgins. She made the tarts."

That's another beauty about Elvine's po'try. You can remember such a sight of it.

"That book'll do the business, Elvine," says I, as she got up to go. "You jest lay low for a day

or two, an' all will go well. But I wouldn't resk nothin' by monkeyin' around like Mirandy, Elvine, when he does come to the point; will you?"

"Who does, Mis' Bassett?" says she; but before I could answer in comes Si with that jug o' molasses I didn't want, so I hadn't no chanst to tell her no more an' after hangin' around for a spell she went off. Si went over an' set the molasses down on my best feather cushion.

"You sartainly air the beateree, Hepsey," says he. "An' there's more than me that thinks so, I tell you."

I made a grab for the molasses jug with one hand an' faced him with the other, as you might say.

"Si Bartlett," says I, "you've been a-tellin' somebody about Elvine an' Ezry Porter! I see it in your eye. Who was it?"

Si looked like a cat that's been in the cream an' knows you know it.

"It was only Nate Skinner, Hepsey," says he, sidlin' out towards the sink room. "I knew he'd have a feller feelin' for Ezry, an' be glad he was goin' to git it back on Mirandy Peters. He promised not to breathe it to a soul."

"So did you," says I, in my most sarcastic

tone. "An' what did Nate Skinner do when he hern that?"

"Do?. Why, nothin' 't I know of, Hepsey. He seemed to be dretful struck with the idee, but he didn't do nothin'. He said he had an errand over to the Corners."

By that time Si had got to the sink room door, an' he slid through an' out to the barn before you could say Jack Robinson, leavin' me to think the thing over. At first I was afeared Nate'd gone straight to Squire Porter's, but that wa'n't in the direction of the Corners, so I felt that weight was offen my mind; an' then all to onct I sensed what was in the direction of the Corners, an' I could hardly wait to git my dinner work done before I started off to find out how the land lay.

I hadn't got half-way when I see Elvine travellin' along as fast as she could come. Then I knew all in a minute jest how bad a kittle of fish Si had got us into, for she was on the broad grin an' she fairly run when she sighted me.

"Mis' Bassett," she hollered, all outer breath, "it's turned out jest as you said it would. Elnathan came right over this mornin' to ask me to dedicate the book to him. I found him settin' on the door stun when I got home from your house. He said you told Si to tell him. An' it

will be Mis' Elnathan Skinner on the title page, an' oh, Mis' Bassett, I can't never thank you enough."

It was lucky I'd had a suspicion of what was comin' from Elvine's house bein' on the Corners road; otherwise I'd 'a' dropped clean down in my tracks. "Hev you took him?" says I, grabbin' at the one straw.

"Oh, yes," says Elvine. "I done jest as you told me, Mis' Bassett."

I couldn't help heavin' a groan at that, but I told Elvine that I'd ketched a crick in my lame leg, an' she turned around an' helped me home. I didn't have the heart to tell her what she'd missed by Si's foolishness, so I jest let her chipper on. I was in hopes Si'd come in while she was there so he could hear the worst to onct, but we never see hide nor hair of him. Anyway Elvine couldn't stay very long, for she said she had errands at several houses down the road an' to the post-office to see Emeline. I guess she could 'a' trusted me to see Emeline.

As soon as she was gone I went to the barn an' hunted Si up where he was tinkerin' over an old wagon.

"Now, Si Bartlett," says I, when I got through tellin' him the story, "you see what you've gone

an' done, an' I hope you feel as ashamed as you orter." But Si had a cantakerous streak an' wouldn't own up to nothin'. "Wal, I dunno, Hepsey," says he, "mebbe 'twas all for the best. Jest as like as not Elvine would ruther have had Nate Skinner anyhow."

VI

CALLINE'S PLUM PUDDING

HIGH horses is dretful uncomfortable ridin'. O' course I had to stay on mine a spell with Si Bartlett an' not confisticate no more with him about my Matrimony Bureau, but it was pretty tough work I tell you, with the hull town stirred up over Elvine Higgins an' Elnathan, an' Emeline an' Lisha away all day at the post-office. The only way I got on at all was by going to neighbourin' fast an' furious. Land, how I did neighbour them days! Still that ain't quite the same as sozzlin' things over with folks right there to home with your hands in dish-water or the bread pan. An' yet, neighbourin' 'round is real intrustin', too, an' helps a good deal with your company knittin' work.

I'm a great hand for system myself, alwuz was, so I started right down the road from our folkses to the village, takin' one house a day in order. An' that brought me to Calline Simpscott's the day before Thanksgivin'. I'd kinder planned it that way, too, for I wanted to see if her darter Emily Jane had fetched her a new winter bunnet

from Typhoon. She had for some years back, but I kinder hoped she hadn't this time, for I've always liked Calline Simpscott first rate, an' I've been afeared that no woman could expect to have so many bunnets in this life an' gold crowns on the other side o' Jordan.

I stepped in through the side entry into the settin'-room, an' land, I never see such a to do in my life. There sat Calline all covered over with flour, an' a-wipin' of her eyes on a dish towel, an' there was all of the family settin' or stannin' around her wipin' their eyes or laughin' as if they'd found a tee-hee bird in a haw-haw's nest.

"Land o' Goshen," says I, forgettin' all about Elvine an' sinkin' into a rocker 'most on top of McKinley [or Roosevelt, I never can tell which of them twins is which. "Land o' Goshen. What is the goin's on? Have you had a loss?" says I.

"No," says Emily Jane, quick as scat, "a found, Mis' Bassett. Don't you want a few raisins for your to-morrer's puddin'?" An' with that they all begun a-wavin' of paper bags at me till I thought I was losin' my mind.

"Twenty-five pounds of raisins," says Calline, wipin' her specs with the same dish towel. "Whatever shall I do with 'em all, Hepsey?"

"Where'd they come from?" says I. With that they all begun a-laughin' agin, an' then all talkin' to onct till I was most driv' out of my seventeen senses. It wa'n't reelly till I got home an' begun sortin' of it out to tell my folks that I got much heads an' tails of it myself.

You see Calline an' the Deacon is both as good as gold an' as easy as a pair of old shoes, so o' course all their grandchildren admire to come down here an' visit 'em every tack an' turn.

Thanksgivin's they alwuz come, Emily Jane's an' John Knox's an' Abraham Lincoln's an' all the rest on 'em, an' they make a point of gettin' there three or four days beforehand; to get their appetites in good trim, I suppose. They have the kind that grows with the usin' as Scripter says. An' Calline's had trouble for several years 'cause they would get into the raisins an' citron an' things beforehand an' eat 'em up so she was scant when she come to make the plum puddin' for Thanksgivin' dinner an' 'twa'n't always so easy to git anything unexpected like down to the store—Himie Bennett bein' dretful slack twisted an' lockin' up an' goin' home whenever he got the shadder of an excuse. So Calline she decided to get hold of Time by his scalp lock for onct, an' a fortnit or so before-

hand she went down to the village an' got a good stock, seven or eight pounds or so to lay by. Then home she come, an' traipsed all over the house to find a good place to hide 'em away, for o' course nowhere in the buttry was safe, for the young ones would ransack that from top to bottom soon as ever they struck the place.

Finally it come to her about that old clock that used to be Granther Simpscott's that she had a-stannin' behind the sofy in the fore room. Why on earth Calline don't sell that clock an' git a good new one that she could set on the mantelpiece an' have wound up for funerils an' sewin' circles I don't see. I know for a fact that Mis' Lisha Peck that come down from Boston offered her as high as five dollars for it, but she wouldn't part with it. I'm afeared she won't alwuz be offered big prices for her old duds, an' she'll be sorry when it's too late. I've alwuz found the time to hunt for eggs was when you heard the hens a-cacklin'.

Howsumever, that's neither here nor there; when she ketched sight of that clock, it struck her that there was the place an' she leaned over an' popped her bag down inside.

The same idea, if you'll b'lieve it, struck Calline's darter Cynthy about the same time, an'

she went down to the village, entirely unbeknownst to her ma, an' swapped off a mess o' butter she'd jest made for five or six pounds more o' raisins.

I'll bet Himie Bennett was mad enough, to have 'em clean out his stock for him that way, Thanksgivin' jest a-comin' on too. I can't quite make out why he didn't tell Cynthy about her ma, but there Cynthy's so deef she'd say, "Pretty well, thank you," ef you asked her what time 'twas. She takes it from Old Man Simpscott. All his side is as deef as posts. Alwuz was. An' I s'pose she probably tho't Himie was a-talkin' about the price o' hen's eggs. Wal, Cynthy jest stuck her raisins away in an old ginger jar up on the top buttry shelf, an' Calline she come acrost 'em the next day when she begun her comp'ny house cleanin'. For a minute, she was clean beat, for of course she thought they was hern, but she's gittin' dretful forgitful, she jest come to the conclusion that she'd put 'em there herself stid of in the clock-case. She was so busy she forgot to look an' then she was in such a hurry to finish her house cleanin' that the hull thing slipped her mind.

Next day or so the folks come, but, as luck would have it, Cynthy was sent for that same

day to come an' take keer of old Mis' Hathaway —she had one of her spells o' brown-kitters an' her darter wa'n't to home. Cynthy is a good nurse, I will give in, an' anyway folks with any sense would druther be took care of by a good-natured neighbour than by one of these here sharp spoken trained nurses that hev got to be waited on like queens. Pauliny Haskins, over to Typhoon, she had one when she was sick an' they do say she had to pay her as much as ten dollars a week, but land that ain't believeable o' course, but mebbe 'twas as high as four or four an' a quarter—folks do go to such dretful lengths nowdays.

Jest as Cynthy was a-startin', she remembered about them raisins, so she clumb up to the top buttry shelf an' got 'em down an' put 'em on the table, meanin' to tell her ma about 'em before she left. Jest then she see 'twas a-beginnin' to snow, so she went up-stairs to take offen her Sunday hat an' put on her prayer-meetin' one. While she was gone, one o' them meddlin' young ones—I'll bet five cents 'twas one o' John Knox's —see that bundle a-settin' alongside of Cynthy's satchel, so what does she do but pop it in, thinkin', she says, that her a'nt meant to pack it. Jest give me one of these here helpful people that

know your business better'n you do yourself, for making trouble, but there, I s'pose that child meant it for the best.

The Hathaways had promised to send over to git Cynthy, an' when she come down, lo an' behold there was John Henry himself waitin' for her out in his bran new buggy, an' she was so flustered to think she'd changed her bunnet that them raisins slipped her mind entirely. Nothin' could be done though, for he'd seen her an' hollered, an' besides 'tain't best to keep men folks waitin' as every married woman knows; but 'twas a cryin' shame, for there she had to go along in that old prayer-meetin' bunnet that she'd wore rain or shine for three years an' a little thing like that may turn the hull scales when you're in the market. Men folks do like new hats dretful well (when they don't have to buy 'em, that is), an' her Sunday hat that year had five or six red poppies an' blue an' yeller roses on it besides. I've sometimes had fears that Cynthy was a little fixy for a perfessor, but land, I dunno, I do like to see folks sorter gay an' cheerful lookin'. It helps you along in this world o' woe an' trouble.

Anyhow, no sooner had Cynthy got well started for Gran'ma Hathaway's than Calline ketched

sight o' the ginger jar, a-settin' on the lower shelf in the buttry, so she went an' looked in, an' o' course no raisins was to be seen. Knowin' full well what limbs them grandchildern o' hern were, she naterally thought they'd 'a' found them raisins an' et 'em up but she thought she wouldn't ask no questions an' set 'em to lyin'.

As luck would hev it, this all happened on the grocery man from Callicut's day, so she ordered another lot an' when they come she wrapped 'em all up good in a clean white apron an' dropped 'em over back of the flour barril—at least she meant to, but jest then she hern Roosevelt an' McKinley out in the kitchen (they're Abraham Lincoln's twins, you know), so she dropped her bag real quick an' come out to see what they was up to, dropped 'em into the barril 'stid of behind it, but o' course she never knew that till afterwards.

She felt a little nervous though, for Roosevelt an' McKinley had eyes like gimlets, an' could see clean through a house if there was sumthin' to eat on the other side of it, an' she thought maybe they'd suspicioned sumthin' when she hurried out of the buttry that time, so next day she went to look. Sure enough, of course there wa'n't no raisins to be found an' not so much as an apron string left to tell the tale. Calline told me—but

don't you breathe it to a soul, for Calline's a perfessor, an' it mus' be kep'—that when she found them raisins gone she sat right down then an' there an' said, "The Old Cat!" three times a-runnin', jest as hard as she could. You can tell from that jest how flustered Calline was, for she's alwuz been a real mild-spoken woman.

Her dander, as you kin see, was clean riz up an' she jest waited for nothin' an' nobody. She put on her Sunday bunnet an' mantilly right over her brown caliker an' trailed straight off down to the store an' jest made Himie Bennett let her have his very last lot o' raisins. He hated to like a dog, for he said lots more folks might want 'em an' he couldn't git around to order agin till Christmas time. Then he tried to sell her some old prunes instid but she stuck firm to raisins. Them mild-mannered, soft-spoken folks air jest like Plymouth Rock when once their backs gits up. Earthquakes couldn't move 'em.

This time she made up her mind that she'd hide the bag where nobody on earth could find 'em, ef she had to carry 'em around in her apron pocket daytimes an' sleep with 'em under her piller nights. An' that's jest what she did; she hid 'em so safe an' sound that when she come to look for 'em the day before Thanksgivin' she

couldn't for the life of her remember where she'd put 'em. She hunted high an' low, even to ransackin' of her piece bags, but 'twa'n't no manner o' use an' finally, late that afternoon, she sent for all the folks, an' they all come except Em'ly Jane; she was out in the buttry in the middle of a huckleberry pot pie, an' couldn't, an' then she set down in the fore room an' told 'em all about it. She was so flustered that she begun a-wipin' of her specs on the dish towel, for it did seem as if Thanksgivin' wouldn't be Thanksgivin' without no plum puddin'. The grandchildern certainly did feel bad an' make an awful to do, an' when they all said they hadn't so much as seen one of 'em, Calline begun to get scairt. It seemed so dretful an' mysterious as if Providence didn't want 'em to have no raisins an' had took 'em away from 'em one by one. Ain't it odd how folks is so much more likely to think it's Providence a-takin' away than a-givin'? Howsumever it wa'n't long before Calline's religin got propped up agin for jest at that minute in walked Em'ly Jane from the buttry. "What's all this boohooin' an' takin' on?" says she. "Is anybody hurt? An' if not, jest look an' see what I've run on to in the flour barril!" An' there was one of them bags of raisins come to light! Cal-

line said she was so tickled that she hugged it right up against her brown bask waist, flour an' all, an' didn't care a mite.

Now, how true 'tis that it never rains but it pours. I've often thought that was the truest thing that Solomon ever wrote. I s'pose he knew it havin' had that experience in wives. Still, of course 'tain't for me to expose Scripter, not bein' president of the sewin' circle jest now. It got to pourin' that time sure enough, tho' pourin' raisins, for no sooner had they done rejoicin' over that prodigal son than in come Old Man Simpscott grinnin' from ear to ear. "You air the beateree, Calline," says he. "I guessed likely Granther's clock could tell a thing or two ef we asked it, an' sure enough here they be!"

Calline begun to laff, for it all come back to her about that clock case, but before she could say a word the door opened agin an' in popped Cynthy an' John Henry back from old Mis' Hathaway's. "What's all this?" says she. "Raisins? Wal, I declare for't, the skies must rain down raisins in this part of the world. Here's a hull bagful that I found in my satchel when I got over to Gran'ma Hathaway's!" To say dumbfounded ain't half to express the state they all was in.

Even Abraham Lincoln's wife couldn't no more'n say, "Mercy to us an' on us an' for us! Dear me suz a day!"—an' a few other things like that. She was eenymost tongue-tied—for her.

Suddenly Calline jumped right up outer her chair. "I know where them other raisins be!" says she, an' she fairly run outer the room. They all thought she'd gone clean outer her senses, till back she come with that last bagful in her hand. Then she set down an' bust out a-laffin', an' so did they all till every one on 'em was a-cryin' like a weepin' willer. An' that's how they set when I opened the side entry door an' walked in on 'em. You'd 'a' thought all that hullabaloo would have driv' my Matrimony Bureau clear outer my mind, wouldn't you? But lawsy me, I guess that must 'a' got to be second nature with me now. Before I'd any way got the rights of the raisin story I'd ketched sight of John Henry Hathaway a-stannin' on one foot over in a corner grinnin' like a Cheshy cat, an' the minute I got a chanst to git in my oar, I says:

"Wal, Calline, if you ask me what to do with them raisins, I'd say, git extry help to eat 'em up. John Henry now an' Gran'ma Hathaway. They ain't had no chanst to git up a Thanksgivin', I'll bet a cooky."

John Hathaway nodded an' grinned an' looked at Cynthy in that sheepish way that's a dead give away to anybody that's got eyes in their head, so I made bold to speak agin. "An' why," says I, "don't ye ask the Elder an' his folks up to dinner too? Emeline stopped in there yestiddy an' nobody hadn't asked 'em yit. We felt clear shamed for the meetin'-house. I declare I almost give up goin' up to Callicut's to my darter Marthy's so's to have 'em myself."

Calline was jest as scandalized as I was. "The Elder's family!" she says, "an' nobody asked 'em. I hope the Methodists won't never git hold of it. I'll send right down this minute. Deacon, you go an' tackle up."

But my finger wa'n't outer that pie yet. "Sho, now, Calline," says I, "here's John Henry all hitched up an' ready, an' Cynthy with her cloak on. You'll take her right down to the Elder's to carry the invite, won't ye, John Henry?"

He grinned wider'n ever, if so could be, an' I turned to Cynthy. "I'd run up-stairs an' change my bunnet if I was you," I hollered; "seems to me 'twould show more respect to the Elder to go in your Sunday one."

Emily Jane ketched the idee before Cynthy did, an' she kinder pushed her out into the entry,

an' I guess she kinder fixed her up some besides for I hain't never seen Cynthy look so well in years as she did when she an' John Henry driv' out o' the yard.

Then I settled back easy in my chair an' begun to worm the hull story from start to finish out of Calline, while we all set around an' stoned raisins like a house afire, but not so fast as the young ones et the bag full Calline had give them.

We got so intrusted that it didn't seem no time at all till we see John Henry's team come peltin' back into the yard. Bime by in they walked into the settin'-room, lookin' as if they'd been stealin' sheep.

"Ma," says Cynthy.

"Mis' Simpscott," says John Henry.

"Wal," says Calline, lookin' at 'em both.

"Pa," says Cynthy again.

"Deacon Simpscott," says John Henry.

"Wal," says the Deacon.

It sounded jest like a childern's dialogue to a Sunday-school concert.

"For the land's sake," says I, "what's up?"

Then they turned to me.

"Mis' Bassett," says Cynthy.

"Mis' Bassett," says John Henry.

If I'd 'a' said, "Wal," the land only knows how

long they'd have kep' it up, but I was too nerved up to say no piece.

"Out with it," says I; "crack off the whip."

Wal, I'd had hopes when I see 'em startin' off in that buggy, but even I wa'n't prepared for what followed.

"We've got married," says both on 'em together.

Folks had orter run up lightning-rods for pieces of news like that. The hull kit an' caboodle of us was so flustrated that nobody but Abraham Lincoln's wife even knew they had a tongue in their head.

"Mercy sakes alive!" says she. "Who to?"

"Him!" "Her!" says they together again.

Then my tongue come onglued. I was bound not to let Abraham Lincoln's wife git ahead of me agin. An' lucky enough I was there to ask some sensible questions, for Calline jest set an' smoothed that dish towel as if 'twas a cat.

"Set right down an' tell us all about it," says I. "You begin, John Henry, you're the man." I knew I could make John Henry talk if I reelly set out to, an' Cynthy was scairt fair dumb. It was the first time since she was born that she'd done anything on her own hooks.

Old Man Simpscott pushed up the red caliker

rocker for John Henry, an' I fixed him with my specs same as I used to when he was in my Sunday-school class. Land, I almost begun: "What is the chief end of man?" but I ketched myself in time.

"Wal," says I, takin' my turn at last.

"Wal," says he, "Mis' Bassett an' Cynthy's folks, it was reelly Elder Pease that done it."

"So I s'posed," says I dry like. "Folks in the Center don't usually think it's decent to be married by no Justice of Peace."

"I didn't mean the splicin'," says he. "I meant the hull idee as you might say. Cynthy an' I ain't reelly the ones to blame."

"How's that?" snaps I. John Henry's well enough but I myself like full better a man with ginger enough to be to blame for his own weddin'!

"Wal," says John Henry again.

I'd had so much "Wal"—t' I was gittin' sick myself.

"Wal, when we driv' into the Elder's yard, he was a-choppin' wood by the back fence an' he come right round, kinder grinnin'. 'Come to get married?' says he. Wal, I'd always kinder lotted on splicin' up with Cynthy some time——"

"In Kingdom come," says I, under my breath—but John Henry didn't hear me—nobody did

but Emily Jane, an' she sorter winked at me. Emily Jane is real knowledgeable, she is. But law, there was John Henry a-moseyin' on an' me reelly a-listenin' to him.

"But I didn't have no special idee of when an' neither had Cynthy, I s'pose, an' I was so beat I couldn't think of a thing to say, so I jest nodded. Cynthy, o' course, hadn't ketched what he said so she leaned forrad.

"'Ma wants to know if you an' Mis' Pease will come up to our house to-morrer at dinner time,' says she. 'To-morrer,' yells the Elder. 'Oh, you're goin' to wait till to-morrer, be ye? I thought by the bunnet mebbe you was goin' to git married to-day.'

"Cynthy ketched part of that an' she got kinder red an' reached up an' fixed her bunnet on her head, an' it did look real good. It seemed sort of a shame to disapp'int the Elder too. I shoved my hand in my vest pocket an' found I had fifty cents an' that kinder settled it.

"'Cynthy,' says I, hollerin' in her good ear, 'the Elder wants that you an' me should git married to-day. I've got money enough to pay him so mebbe we'd better. You've got on your good hat.' She couldn't seem to think of nothin' agin it so we went in an' got spliced."

"What about the license?" says I. John Henry grinned more sheepish than ever. "Why, I got one of them on a dare when I was a young feller," says he, "an' I've carried it around in my wallet ever since. It had a blank for the girl's name."

That was the last straw, as you might say, an' we all jest let go an' hollered an' laughed fit to kill.

Cynthy seen that her folks wa'n't mad with her so she kinder perked up an' then we all begun a-congratulatin' of 'em both an' a-askin' of 'em questions.

Land, we might jest as well 'a' saved our breath to cool our porridge. John Henry had told every livin' thing either of 'em knew about it. As soon as I sensed that I tied my bunnet strings an' pinned my shawl, an' started off for home.

No grass grew under my feet as I travelled to our folkses, I tell you, for I felt I'd orter be the first to tell 'em an' I knew Emeline would want to have an early supper an' git right back to the post-office.

Si Bartlett was jest comin' in from the barn as I hove in sight. "Howdy do, Hepsey," says he. "Where ye been gone all afternoon?"

"Oh," says I, unconcerned as I walked into the kitchen, "I've been up to call on the bride."

"Bride?" says he. "Dew tell. Has Elvine an' Elnathan got spliced so quick?"

"Oh, I dunno," says I, foldin' up my shawl, "'tain't her I was speakin' of. 'Twas Mis' John Henry Hathaway I meant, she that was a Simpscott."

Si like to keeled over into the wood box. "Cynthy Simpscott," says he. "By the great horn spoon! Say, Hepsey, if you'll tell me jest how you brought that to pass, I'll never breathe it to a livin' soul, honest Injun, I won't."

VII

KETURY'S DIAMOND WEDDING

MEBBE everybody wouldn't see the connection between a Matrimony Bureau an' a Di'mond Wedding. I dunno as I should myself a while back, but land, I've noticed that when you start to runnin' other folkses business for 'em bime by you git so you feel as if most o' their pies was baked with a hole in 'em for your finger.

Leastways, I'm free to confess I do almost an' that Di'mond Weddin' Anniversary wa'n't no exception, though land, I wonder now that my finger didn't git scorched clear off, a-messin' into Cap'n Vally Slocum's mince-meat.

The cap'n's full name is Vally D. Shomber—reel heathenish an' outlandish, I call it—but you see his father was a sea cap'n an' he picked up a terrible hifalutin, novel-readin' young piece in some seaport town or other an' married her, an' she seen that name in one o' her books, some count or dook or other, I s'pose, an' tacked it on to her boy. An' his sister's name is Aurorer Bory Alice.

Wal, Vally full well lives up to his name, I tell you. He don't think no small shakes o' himself, Vally don't—thinks he runs the hull town an' the state o' Massachusetts to boot. So folks s'picioned there'd be trouble jest as soon as they hern tell that he'd married Ketury Hopkins, down to Little Compton. For Ketury she was the sassiest little piece that ever breathed the breath o' life. So o' course they fit—fit week in an' week out, except when they didn't speak at all.

They fit most over their young ones' names. Vally was awful sot up over hisn, an' he was bound that his childern should have the same hifalutin kind, but Ketury was jest as sot t'other way. He wanted one named after him an' another after Aurorer Bory Alice, an' he come home from one cruise jest set on Patagonia an' Sierra Nevada. But o' course he couldn't git the best o' Ketury there. She was alwuz home to name the babies, an' he, more'n likely, was off on a cruise; so Ketury she got her way every time an' carried out her idee, which was to go down through the Old Testament as fur as was necessary. It worked all right for the boys—there was Joshua Samuel, Ezra Nehemiah, Job Solomon, Isaiah Jeremiah, an' Ezekiel Dan'l—

but the books o' the Bible is ruther scant for girls. Ruth an' Esther's all right o' course, but when the third girl come, Ketury was quite put to it. She sent for me to come down an' help her, for she was bound to git the baby named before the cap'n got home, an' he was expected any day. So we thrashed over the hull list of 'em from start to finish, an' I was jest a-sayin' that she might compromise on Hanner, seein' she was the *ma* of a book ennyhow, when all of a sudden the same idee struck us both—Genesis! we says—both together, Jennie—Sis—jest as plain as day, an' Genesis it was. I went right up to the town clerk's office an' had it writ down in the book.

Wal, that was reelly the last straw. The next day Cap'n Vally got home, bound an' determined to have his way this time; an' there she was all tagged Genesis firm an' fast. They do say he swore somethin' dretful, an' that very day he begun turnin' sod for another house across the road. He worked on it every time he was home after that; but they never separated till it come around their thirtieth anniversary. They was the greatest on keepin' anniversaries that you ever did see. They'd kep' 'em every five years reg'lar since they was married, an' sometimes be-

tween whiles when they could git up any new kind of a weddin' to have. Sometimes 'twould set 'em to speakin' for the first time in a year or so.

Wal, so it come around to the thirtieth, which was the time they'd lotted on partin', for the two oldest girls was married off an' most o' the boys doin' for themselves—there wa'n't only two left to hum, Zek'l Dan'l an' Genesis. But the anniversary passed off so well that Vally most decided to stay on with Ketury so't they could have another. Bein's 'twas to be their last, they decided to have the golden one then an' there, and it did go off well. The childern clubbed together an' give Ketury a gold breastpin an' Vally a gold watch chain (real A No. 1 plate they was, both on 'em), an' Ketury she made gold cake an' yaller custard, an' 'twas a dretful harnsome affair. Vally was as proud as a peacock, an' he went a-sailin' round smilin' like a Jack-o'-lantern, bossin' this an' bossin' that, an' givin' Zek'l Dan'l the name o' Sierra Nevada, an' callin' Genesis Patagonia, kinder free an' easy like, an' tellin' Ketury 'fore all the folks how fat she was gittin'. Finally Ketury's dander riz right up high. "Land, cap'n," says she, "I was just a-thinkin' how you was a-baldin' off an' a-poorin' away. I only

hope Zek'l Dan'l an' Genesis'll take after the Hopkinses an' keep a few spears o' hair an' not wizen all up!" says she.

Wal, Cap'n Vally he was all struck in a heap, as you might say, for the cap'n was jest as vain as the next man, an' he'd thought he was a-stayin' a gay young spark while his wife was a-growin' old an' humbly—so that ref'rence to his looks settled him. They divided the stuff that very night, an' the next day he moved over to t'other house, takin' Zek'l Dan'l with him an' gittin' his sister, Aurorer Bory Alice, to housekeep for him. Genesis stayed with her ma an' they kep' hens, an' the cap'n kep' a cow an' pigs, an' they sent things back an' forth; an' all lived there jest as neighbourly as you please year in an' year out, 'cept for he an' she never speakin' to each other nor goin' to each other's house.

Still, I could see that each time the five years come round it was dretful hard on both on 'em not to celebrate. When the fiftieth hove in sight, 'twas too much for Ketury. "Mis' Bassett!" says she one day, "I'm a-goin' to have a di'mond weddin'. We've had our golden one, an' di'mond's the next, you can't deny. I've thought it all over," says she, "an' I've been married fifty year, hain't I?—an' Vally is still

a-livin' ef he hain't a-livin' with me, an' I hain't had an anniversary in twenty year, an' I'm goin' to have it," says she.

"I s'pose you're goin' to ask Vally?" says I, kinder breaking the crust.

"No, indeed, Hepsey Bassett," says she; "what's Vally got to do with it, I'd like to know?"

"Ketury Slocum!" says I. "It's as much Vally's anniversary as 'tis yourn," says I. "It ain't decent for you not to invite him to his own di'mond weddin'."

It was hard work, but when it comes to talkin' common sense I don't knock under to nobody, an' finally Ketury give in an' promised to send Vally an invite. But she wouldn't tell me none o' the rest of her plans. I couldn't for the life of me make out how she was a-goin' to give a di'mond weddin' to the Center, where we never so much as thought o' wearin' di'monds, let alone givin' on 'em away; but she jest smiled mysterious like, an' says she, "Wait an' see, Mis' Bassett," says she, an' with that she started home to write her invites.

Wal, when Vally D. Shomber got hisn he was as crestfallen as anything, to think Ketury'd got ahead of him an' thought o' that anniversary first.

But he an' Aurorer put their heads together, an' next thing we knew out come another set o' invites—from Cap'n Vally, for the very same day, only his was for the forenoon an' stay to dinner, an' hers for the afternoon an' supper. He thought he'd take the wind outer her sails that way, but Ketury Slocum ain't so easy scairt.

"That'll set mine off better," says she, an' we never even seen her peekin' out from behind the front shades when folks begun goin' over to Vally's at the hour app'inted.

Between the two front windows in the fore room Vally had spread a big square table all empty, an' a sign over it read: "Put all the Di'monds Here!" O' course everybody sniggered at that, but that was all that happened till dinner-time; an', as most on us women folks hadn't brought our work—two weddin's in one day made it seem so much like Sunday—we did git sorter tired settin' around an' visitin' three mortal hours, specially as lots had to stand up, there not bein' chairs enough to go round. But Aurorer did give us a good dinner, first-rate, an' the men folks all come for the noon spell an' we got real chirked up, so that by the time they'd gone home ag'in, an' we'd got the dishes washed

up, we was ready to go over to Ketury's jest as she run up the front shades.

The Slocum girls an' boys had been goin' back an' forth between the two houses all the mornin', an' like as not some on 'em had give their ma an idee, for first an' foremost she had plenty o' chairs for us to set on—borried 'em outen the meetin'-house vestry. I see Joshua Samuel a-fetchin' 'em over in his light waggin 'bout one o'clock.

Wal, you never see anythin' like that house in all your born days—everythin' on earth was set di'mondin', an' what couldn't be di'mondin' was catty-cornered. Ketury has a great store o' mats, braided an' drawn an' all, an' they was every one on 'em put down di'monded; so was the tidies on every chair an' even the picters on the walls. Land, how they did look, the Infant Samuel a-settin' down catty-cornered an' all the mottoes goin' either up-hill or down dale—an' o' course the tables was sot crooked, an' even the chairs was in fours backed up together.

There wa'n't no mistakin' what kind of a weddin' that was, I tell you, an' specially when you looked at Ketury herself. She had on her best black alapacky an' she'd sewed two rows o' big purple cotton di'monds all round the skirt an'

small ones up and down the front of her bask waist. You mightn't think so unless you seen it, but 'twas reel fixy trimmin'.

Wal, after we'd laid off our things an' got seated, Ketury she went round an' give us all out little di'mond-shaped pieces o' cloth, white cotton cloth that she'd coloured with Di'mond Dyes, blue an' yaller an' green an' red, an' we all sot round, sociable like, an' pieced patchwork all the afternoon—we most finished it afore supper-time, an' it'll make a reel harnsome quilt for Ketury to remember her anniversary by.

She had Elvine Higgins read a piece too. I declar' I think 'twas 'most the best one Elvine's writ yet, but I ain't got a copy o' this one, 'cause she don't have 'em printed in the *Gazette* no more; she's savin' on 'em for her book. Some folks is so p'ison mean they said they wouldn't buy it till she'd wrote some new ones—but I ain't namin' no names.

Wal, as I set there a-sewin' an' a-talkin' I kep' a-thinkin' that there wa'n't nobody on earth that would enjoy that anniversary as much as Vally would an' it did seem a cryin' shame that he wa'n't there.

"If he was young folks," thinksed I to myself, "I'd set my Matrimony Bureau onto him." An'

"Ketury went 'round an' give us all little diamond-shaped pieces o' cloth."

hen, land, it come over me all to onct that there's a sight more mendin' than makin' in this world anyhow an' I dunno why my Bureau shouldn't undertake a little tinkerin' job once in a way.

I slid out in the back entry an' took one of Ketury's old shawls an' threw over my head to run across the road to Vally's.

The front shade was down tight to the bottom when I got there but I miss my guess if 'twa'n't Vally's eye that I seen lookin' through a crack on the off-side. Be that as it may, he was out in the wood-shed when I found him, choppin' away for dear life, with his jumper an' overalls on.

"Howdy, cap'n," says I. "Did I drop my silver thimble that Gran'ma Parsons give me outer my apron pocket in your fore room?" I lost that thimble to a Sunday-school picnic in Thatcher's grove summer before last but I hope the Lord'll forgive me. You have to go at Vally kinder kitterin' like.

"Why, no, Hepsey," says he. "I come right out to git my wood chopped, but Aurory didn't say nothin' about it. She cleaned up in a hurry an' went over to that tomfool celebration of Ketury's."

"Funny you wa'n't asked," says I.

"I was," says he, rufflin' up like a little bantam.

"I thought so, myself," says I, "but some said they guessed you wa'n't reelly by your not bein' there."

"I wa'n't there 'cause I didn't want to be," growls Vally. "I don't want to see none o' Ketury's tomfool contraptions."

"That's jest what I told 'em," says I. "I know Ketury wouldn't never 'a' felt right not to invite him," says I. "He jest dassent come over for fear she's got ahead of him," says I.

"Wal, you can jest go back an' tell 'em 'tain't so," says Vally, mad as a hornet.

"I dunno," says I, "as 'tain't. You'll have to brace up an' show 'em yourself," says I. "Half of it's yourn, anyway, you know, an' it's sartainly the top-notch of all the anniversaries ever I see." With that I started off around the corner of the wood-shed.

"Hold on, Hepsey," he hollered. "I want to ask you somethin'."

"Come an' look for yourself," says I, over my shoulder.

"Is Ketury expectin' of me?"

"Course," says I, stoppin' a minute. "It's your anniversary, hain't it? But you'd better

slick up good, for Ketury's got on the best lookin' rig I've seen in many a long day, an' I'd hate to have her 'shamed of you."

With that I hurried off across the road as fast as my lame leg would take me, for I was afeared folks'd miss me an' begin to ask questions. But, land, it jest shows how we ain't none of us such big toads in the puddle as we think we be. Ketury was jest a-beginnin' to set the table when I slipped in, an' everybody was so took up with tryin' not to appear to notice what she had to eat that they never said "Aye," "Yes," nor "No" to me about where I'd been, an' I turned to an' helped Ketury.

I dunno as her supper was a mite better'n Aurorer Bory Alice's, but some way it looked so fixy like that it did seem to taste better. Everythin' was cut out di'mondin', the biscuits an' the cookies an' the doughnuts, an' ef you'll b'lieve it, the pie too, an' even the men folks seemed to relish it better—they et enough, goodness knows. Men folks has to be pretty pindlin' afore they need to take any bitters for their appetites!

Jest as we was a-settin' down to the table, the door opened, an' in walked Cap'n Vally D. Shomber, tryin' not to look so sheepish as he must 'a' felt, but more as if he'd been a-comin' in to

supper jest so every night for the last twenty year. He wa'n't, o' course, unprepared, an' he took the hull thing in like a flash.

"Wal, wal, Ketury," says he, "we sartainly beat the Dutch when it comes to anniversaries an' celebrations, an' I hain't afraid to say so. I guess I'll have to come across an' stay till the next one so as to be on hand an' not miss nothin'."

"All right, cap'n," says Ketury; "set right down an' help yourself!" Vally didn't have to be asked no second time, I tell you. His fork was in every cake-dish an' pie-plate afore you could say Jack Robinson.

"Wal, ma," he chuckled, "you've sartainly struck a di'mond mine this time. We'd better name Joshua Samuel's new baby Golconda!"

An' ef you'll b'lieve it, they did.

VIII

PHILURY JANE, DEACONESS

BY this time, I s'pose, I was so sot up that there wa'n't hardly no livin' with me. I reelly believe I'd kinder got the idee that when my Matrimony Bureau said "snip" folks had got to say "snap" whether they wanted to git married or not, tho' o' course I never said it to myself in so many words. Si Bartlett naterally tried to take me down a peg or two by talkin' off an' on about bricks an' pertaters. But, land, what could Si Bartlett do? It takes Providence to settle your hash when you git to thinkin' you can wind up the Universe same as if 'twas your kitchen clock, an' Providence sartainly took me in hand when it basted me out my next stent.

Talk about bricks; 'twas bricks without straw, as Scripter says, an' an all winter's job it was, too. I never should 'a' been able to carry it through in the world if she that was most concerned hadn't had eenymost as much gumption as I've got myself. 'Twas Philury Jane Mosher,

an' she come by it nateral, for she's darter to an own cousin o' mine, Emerancy Winslow, she that married Bill Mosher an' died three years later o' gallopin' consumption.

In spite of this visitation, Philury Jane growed up as full o' sinful pride as an egg is o' meat, an' as worldly as they make 'em. She never stopped short o' nothin', I tell you.

Why, she wore breastpins an' bead chains, an' had several different red an' blue bask waists, an' crimped her hair both with tongs an' braids, though I went over myself an' laboured with her an' p'inted out to her that braidin' an' tongs was specially spoke against, an' hairpins was the only reel Scripteral manner o' crimpin' the hair. I did my dooty by her good, for she was my own cousin's child; but there, I might as well 'a' saved my breath, for after that she even went to the lengths o' stickin' ribbon bows onto it, an' I jest washed my hands of her.

About a year ago, though, Elder Moses Simpkins come around here holdin' revival meetin's. It was a great work Elder Simpkins did in this here sinful town, I tell you, an' there was a sight o' young converts that year; eenymost a dozen, I should say, but Philury Jane Mosher she was the worldliest one of all.

Wal, howsumever, you know how it alwuz goes, them that's the wust beforehand turns right around an' takes the front seat for heaven, once they git headed that way; an' so it was with Philury Jane. Off went her glass breast-pins an' her bead chains, off went her red an' blue bask waists (she replaced 'em immejitly by brown an' black ones, o' course. I wouldn't want nobody to think I'd label Philury Jane), an' as to braids an' tongs, she slicked her hair down as flat as if the old cat had licked it, such was her zeal for the meetin'-house.

Then she bought a package o' Di'mond Dyes an' dyed all her bask waists black, an' they do say that she throwed her bead chains an' breast-pins into the mill-pond, but I can't reelly swear to that. Still, nothin' could look primmer'n Philury Jane from that time on, an' when Elder Simpkins come back about Christmas time, you wouldn't 'a' known her for the same person. I went up with her after meetin' to shake hands an' he had to settle his specs good an' hard before he recognized her at all, tho' she yelled out several times that she was Philury Jane Mosher. Some folks is deef as posts, but Elder Moses Simpkins is deefer than a hull rail fence. I sometimes think that's why he has such luck

evangelizin'—nobody can't never break up his meetin's a-sassin' back.

Wal, he stood an' looked Philury Jane over an' then he nodded real majestic three or four times an' smiled down at her most approvin' like. "Yes, yes, Sister Mosher," says he. "The meetin'-house has marked you for its own. Be you a-doin' deaconess work?" says he. Philury Jane turned red as a beet an' was so flabbergasted she couldn't speak, so I hastened to explain that 'twas tailoress work she was doin' at seventy-five cents a day an' board, but that anyway all the deacons in our meetin'-house was old enough to be her pa, not to say gran'pa, an' was all married besides, so there wasn't no chanst for Philury Jane; but o' course he never hern a word. "Yes, yes," says he. "These here young converts is jest what we need for deaconesses," says he, an' he smiled even sweeter at Philury Jane. But by this time she'd found her tongue. "Oh," says she, real distrested, "had I orter be a deaconess, Elder Simpkins? There ain't no chanst here in Hicksville. The deacons is all took." A word or two evidently pierced his ear-drums, for he looked sorter grieved like an' says: "The number o' deacons don't make no difference. There's plenty o' chanst right here in Hicksville.

"Had I orter be a Deaconess, Elder Simpkins?"

All you've got to do is to look." We both on us yelled out to know who the "Chanst" was, for we'd run over all the deacons hastily in our minds an' there wa'n't one at liberty, so to speak, but jest then he turned away to shake hands with Brother Cottle an' Brother Seth Jenkins, who'd driv' all the way down from Titicut to hear him, an' that was the last word we could get with him.

A more downcast mortal than Philury Jane I never see in my born days. She busted right out a-cryin', an' I had to yank her out through the vestry an' start off for home with her straight-away. I was afraid she was a-spottin' my new plaid shawl, too, but there, that jest shows how it pays to buy the best that's goin'. I paid two dollars an' a quarter to Himie Bennett's for that plaid shawl an' it never showed a stain. An' I talked to that girl good ; I p'inted out that there wa'n't no deacons lying round loose in the village nor in all Hicksville as fur as I knew ; I told her if 'twas her dooty the Lord would p'int the way ; I argufied up-hill an' down dale, as you might say, an' it did chirk her up first rate. Philury Jane never was one o' these here weepin'-willer kind, an' I wa'n't a mite surprised when she come round to my house the next mornin' with firm determination seated on to her forrud, as the

poet says. "If Providence by the mouth of Elder Simpkins has set me a stent, A'nt Hepsey," says she, "that stent I'm a-goin' to tackle, an' tho' bein' a deaconess in this town is the toughest stent I ever come up against, a deaconess I'm goin' to be," says she.

I'd been a-thinkin' it over in the night watches, an' I was ready for her.

"That's right," says I, "an' I'm willin' to help you do it, tho' how under the canopy beats me jest at present. Still, it's when folks puts their shoulders to the wheel an' works hand in hand with Providence that they git their prayers answered fastest. My idee," says I, "is for you first to canvass this town thorough."

"That's jest my idee, too," says she, pinnin' her shawl good an' tight with a big, black safety-pin. "I know full well there hain't no deacons in the market here, but I'm a-goin' visitin' round all this week to see if I can hear of any in any neighbourin' village that hain't already bespoke," an' off she started.

Friday afternoon I see her over to A'nt Sophi' Pierce's to a sewin' circle, but she didn't have anything encouragin' to relate. Joe James Peck's wife, she that was a Brightman, thought that mebbe her cousin up in New Hampshire had

wrote her about a deacon up there that was a widower, but that was six months or so ago, an' probably he'd been snapped up in the meantime, an' anyway, New Hampshire was a dretful long ways off an' unhandy to git at, besides not bein' anybody there that she knew when she got there.

But Philury Jane Mosher an' me ain't goin' to be downed by no small shakes, I can tell you, an' our dander was up. The next week, we planned for her to go clear down to Necropolis to visit Mirandy Warner, she that was a Peters, an' see for herself how the land lay over there. So down she went. But Necropolis seemed to be more discouragin' than Hicksville if anythin'. I'd never sensed before jest how popular deacons is in the matrimony bureaus, an' the deaconesses was all middlin' young an' real hale an' hearty, an' no vacancies to be heard of. But Philury jest shet her teeth an' started right out the next week for Typhoon an' from there to Callicut.

I do b'lieve there wouldn't 'a' been a square mile o' the state left that Philury hadn't looked over ef sunthin' hadn't 'a' happened. A Mis' Deacon Skinner over Dilton way up an' died dretful sudden an' unexpected. I couldn't help feelin' as if Philury an' me was to blame, tho' we never laid eyes on the woman—but there,

dooty is dooty, an' every one orter chase her up tight an' grip hard on to her apron strings. So as soon as I heard of it, I sent word to Philury Jane to come right home from Callicut; so she did, hotfoot, I tell you, an' posted right off to hire out for the deacon's housekeeper.

But while she was a-gittin' back from Callicut, in steps Mis' Onias Page, she that was first a Crockett, an' then a Thurston, an' then a Fisher, an' then a Page. She took the job o' consolin' the mournin' relick at two dollars a week, an' a master hand she was at it, too, havin' had so much experience. To him that's had shall be given, is specially true in the matter o' ketchin' husbands. The more you've got rid of, the crazier all the men seem to be to have you try it on them.

Still Philury wa'n't dismayed. She begun visitin' Mis' Page reel stiddy, spendin' the day an' stayin' to tea an' all, but o' course Mis' Page had the inside track, there ain't no denyin' that, so finally Philury Jane jest up an' told her how 'twas an' ast her as a sister in the meetin'-house to remove herself from 'twixt her an' her Dooty. (That was Deacon Skinner, you understand. I dunno as you can alwuz foller these hifalutin figgers o' speech that I use.)

But Mis' Page, she had full as much spiritooal pride as the next one, I tell you, an' if there was a chanst to be a deaconess, she wa'n't a-goin' to let that high office slip through her fingers, I tell you, an' so she told Philury Jane ; an' to save any accidents a-happenin', before the week was out, she'd led Deacon Skinner by the halter, as they say in these here s'ciety columns, an' had a notice put in the paper an' then cut it out an' sent it to Philury Jane.

But land o' Goshen, ef she'd knowed Philury Jane Mosher as well as I do, she'd 'a' thought long an' hard afore she sot herself in the way o' that gal, backed by me an' Providence an' Dooty. (This Dooty don't mean Deacon Skinner. It's not any human person this time.) Less'n a week from that day, Deacon Skinner was upset offen a load of hay an' instantly killed, an' though nobody objected to the widder's wearin' her usual crape veil to the funeril (though it had grown pretty rusty lookin' by this time), still they all agreed that she'd been Mis' Skinner such a short time that 'twa'n't reelly right to take away the title o' Mis' Deacon from his dead an' gone relick an' give it to somebody that had been Mis' Page only the week before, so she only got to be the Widder Skinner for all her pains.

Wal, now, there was Philury Jane's chanst at last, though land! I dunno as I should 'a' known it myself. That's the diff'runce in folks; some on 'em knows a chanst as fur off as they kin see her comin', an' others hain't no idee who 'tis till her back hair is jest a-disappearin' around the corner for good. Philury Jane, now, she alwuz has her spy-glass out, an' chansts don't need to wear no labels for her.

While she was over a-visitin' Mis' Page, she'd fell in with Pelatiah Stubbs, a sandy-haired, youngish-sorter chap that clerked it for Deacon Skinner in his grocery store. She didn't have no thoughts o' him, o' course, her mind bein' soarin' on sech a high spiritooal flight, an' her eyes sot firmly on to the deacon, but Pelatiah he got reel sweet on her afore she'd been over there more'n half a dozen times. He wa'n't even a perfessor when she first come, but he knew that was clear agin him, so he experienced religion an' jined the Church short off, an' it helped him with Philury Jane so't she let him tackle up an' carry her home in the grocery waggin several times, an' I b'lieve that on one o' these trips he as much as popped the question. At any rate, she knew full well that she could have him, so what do you b'lieve she did? She sent for him to

fetch her over to the funeril an' then she insisted on stayin' a fortnight an' comfortin' the mournin' relick. The Widder Skinner was mad enough to bite, but they'd been such friends that she couldn't very well refuse, so there Philury stayed.

Pelatiah Stubbs, he had about $800 saved up, an' he told Philury Jane that if she'd marry him he'd buy a white cottage house with green blinds jest around the corner from the store. Now any ordinary woman would 'a' jumped at sech a chanst as that afore you could say Jack Robinson, but not so Philury. In the afternoon, after the funeril, she took Pelatiah into the fore room (the store was closed, o' course, outer respect), an' she talked to him till he promised that ef she wanted him to he'd give that hull $800 clean out to the meetin'-house the next Sunday, 'ceptin' what he needed to buy up the deacon's grocery business. He was clean daft about Philury, you can see that easy enough.

She never said a word more to him, but the next day, right after breakfast, she put on her bunnet an' shawl an' started out to canvass that meetin'-house, beginnin' with the minister's family an' the deacons', an' so down along, an' she told 'em all about Pelatiah's money an' how he was goin' to give it smack out to the meetin'-

house after buyin' up the grocery business, an' then she'd ask 'em if they didn't think 'twas only right to elect him to fill Deacon Skinner's place. Philury's an awful good talker, the kind that can make black look reel whitish like, an' o' course she had a dretful good p'int in his bein' in the grocery business. It does seem to be the most orthodox kinder trade for deacons, some way.

Wal, anyway, however she managed it, the long an' short of it was this: At the end o' that fortni't, Deacon Skinner's old grocery waggin that was, driv' up to my front gate an' out steps Pelatiah Stubbs an' hands out Philury Jane with sech a flourish that I suspicioned sunthin' right away an' I got to the door afore she did. "Philury Jane Mosher!" says I, "wal, I am beat! Be you a-goin' to take Pelatiah Stubbs an' give up bein' a deaconess after all?"

"No, indeed, A'nt Hepsey," says she, smilin' as perky as you please. "I've took Pelatiah Stubbs an' we're on our weddin' journey to Pikesburg this minute, but he was elected deacon over to his meetin'-house yestiddy afternoon," says she. "So it's the Deaconess Philury Jane Stubbs that's a-stannin' on your door stun this minnit."

I ain't usually no hand to be surprised, but I eenymost keeled over this time. "Come in this

"Philury Jane Mosher! Wal, I am beat!"

minnit," says I, "an' tell me all about it. Come in, Deacon Stubbs," I hollered, but they wouldn't stay, even for dinner. Philury said she'd got to git over to Pikesburg where Elder Simpkins was a-holdin' revival meetin's; she wanted to show him that she'd done her dooty an' got her deacon after all, if she did have to see to the makin' of him herself, as you might say.

Si Bartlett had been away for a fortni't a-visitin' his son's folks over to Pride's Crossin' an' he wa'n't here to see Deacon Stubbs an' the Deaconess when they come, so he wanted that I should ride down with him the next week an' see how they was fixed.

An' mercy sakes alive, fixed! You'd 'a' thought she was the Czar of all the Rooshys to hear her go on. They're a-livin' over the store o' course, for land only knows when Pelatiah'll ever git together enough money to buy a house, but Philury, she don't care. They have a Ladies' Aid over there, ste'd of a sewin' circle, they're so toney, an' they'd elected her president right off, an' she teaches a class in Sunday-school an' makes everybody call her Deaconess Stubbs, an' she's happy as a clam at high water. They ain't nobody that I ever knew come nearer to gittin' her druther than Philury Jane Stubbs.

Her last idee she found in the *Zion's Trumpet*, an' she was tackin' of it up when we rode into the yard. It's a sign on the side door where you go to the up-stairs part, an' it says :

DEACONESS HOME
PHILURY JANE STUBBS

IX

ZEKLE'S CARPET

AS we was ridin' along home from Philury's, Si begun a-chucklin'. I hadn't heard so much o' that in some time, for he hadn't tried to be so cunnin' sence that kaflummux of his about Elvine, but he seemed to think now that things was all patched up. That chuckle aggravated me as much as ever, so I didn't say nothin', an' looked right ahead, but he kep' on till I see that I'd got to ask him what the matter was afore he'd quit.

So finally I says, "Wal?" kind of inquirin' to give him a start.

That was jest what he was waitin' for, an' he give me one last long chuckle, an' then he says:

"I was thinkin' about you, Hepsey, up in the heavens above. Jehosaphat! Won't you be havin' a lonesome time!"

"Lonesome?" says I, maddin' right up. "I dunno what you mean, Si Bartlett; how'll I be any lonesomer'n anybody else? Do you think I'll be a-missin' you?" says I sarcastic.

"Land, no," says Si, "you can't miss me, Hepsey; I'll be there I guess if you be. I was jest

a-thinkin' how you'd git along without your stiddy job."

It all sounded dretful sacreligious to me, talkin' about heaven that way, but I felt as if I'd orter probe right down to the bottom of his wickedness anyhow. "Speak out plain," says I, "if you dast. I dunno as you can make your chances of the promised land much worse'n they be now."

I spoke for his good, but land, my words rolled right offen him like water off a duck's back. He was so wropped up in his joke, he couldn't think o' nothin' else.

"Whatever'll you do, Hepsey," says he, slappin' his knee, "without that blamed Matrimony Bureau o' yourn? That's what I'd like to know. Have you forgot about there not bein' no marryin' nor givin' in marriage up there, accordin' to Scripter?"

I declare I had, for a minute, but I wa'n't goin' to let Si Bartlett know it if I had.

"Oh, I'll find plenty to do," says I.

"Oh, no, you won't," says he.

"Oh, yes, I will," says I.

"Well, what?" says he.

"Oh, plenty," says I.

"Oh, no, you won't," says he.

"Oh, yes, I will," says I.

"Well, what?" says he.

An' there we had it back an' forth jest like two young ones. Si Bartlett riles me up as no mortal never has sence Deacon Bassett passed away, an' anyway there wa'n't no sense in his settin' there a-argufyin' about things he didn't have no earthly means of knowin' about.

"You're as sot," says I, finally, "as Zeke Ashley, an' land knows that's sotter'n any mule 'twas ever made."

"Zeke Ashley," says he, changin' his tune. "What's he got to do with sotness? He's as mild spoken a man as there is in Hicksville Center," says he. "When it comes to sotness ——"

"You don't know what you're talkin' about," snaps I. "There ain't a sotter man'n Zeke Ashley in the state o' Massachusetts or the Union as fur as I know. What do you make out o' that carpet, I'd like to inquire?"

"I want to know," says he, kinder slow an' surprised. "What about carpets, Hepsey? I hain't never hern tell o' none."

"Land o' Goshen," says I, "an' you Emeline's father! What be we comin' to? Why, 'twas town talk in this village twenty year ago or that matter."

"Twenty year ago I was livin' in York State,"

says he. "'Twa'n't but eighteen year ago that we come to these parts at all, an' I never see the inside o' the Center till after Emeline married Lisha."

"That's so," says I, kinder grudgin'. "Wal, then, I dunno as you're so much to blame after all. York State's so fur outer the world 't I s'pose you mightn't keep the run of everything that was goin' on. But, land o' Goshen, it's funny nobody never told you, an' he such a near neighbour, too. Why, Zeke Ashley's folks has always lived down the road apiece from our folkses right across from the old stone schoolhouse. An' 'twas owin' to that schoolhouse that he come so near to marryin' Tryphosy Thurston, I s'pose, fur 'twas when she begun a-teachin' school there one winter that he begun a-keepin' company with her. She wa'n't no beauty, fur frummit; but Zekle was a real bashful sorter chap, an' I won't say that it didn't make it consid'able easier for him havin' her comin' every day right acrost the way from his house, an' runnin' in every onct in a while to git a drink o' water, or to find out the right time to set her clock by, an' et cetry. She wa'n't, so to say, good-lookin', but she did know how to fix herself up with ribbins an' sich till she looked real sorter takin', an' her gingham dresses

was alwuz spick an' spandy. I'll say that for her. However 'twas, first we know there was Zeke Ashley a-keepin' company with Tryphosy Thurston. It ain't alwuz the pretty ones that gits the beaux first, as I alwuz used to tell my girls. It's them that has faculty—an' faculty is somethin' you can't learn to school. It has to be born in you—jest like original sin. Bein's you're a man, Si Bartlett, I s'pose you don't reelize what a dretful sight o' helpin' men folks needs 'fore they git up to almost any p'int. The Lord knew what He was about when He made a helpmeet fur 'em.

"But sakes alive, I shall be as long a-comin' to my story as Zekle was a-poppin' the question, an' that's long enough, goodness knows. Zekle Ashley was always dretful kinder mod'rit, an' bashful as they make 'em, an' folks begun to be real anxious for fear he never would get up to the scratch ; an' I do s'pose Tryphosy was all nerved up. But, land, he did git around to it, give him time enough, just as everything else will, even a settin' hen.

"As I said, him an' Tryphosy had been a-keepin' company real stiddy for nigh onto two years ; but folks suspicioned that he hadn't reelly asked her, for when they'd say anythin' to her about

gittin' married an' et cetry she'd jest sorter prim up an' turn red, but never say nothin'. Still, she begun a-piecing bedquilts an' a-weavin' rag carpets, so't we knew she had hopes; but she'd alwuz say they was for her married sister over to Middleboro. But, land sakes, she needn't 'a' been so private; everybody knew what she meant 'em for, an' I declare, it did seem to me I was most as intrusted as she was.

"I do s'pose you know Zekle is a carpenter—don't you?

"Wal, about that time he begun a-puttin' up the frame for a house right down the road, next his pa's. An' still folks knew pretty well that nothin' had been said, an' Tryphosy, she begun to look real peaked. We was a-talkin' about it one afternoon here to my house to sewin' circle—Deacon Blodgett's wife, an' A'nt Sophi' Pierce, an' a number of others—an' we all agreed that somethin' had orter be done. Zekle was a genooine old bach even then, an' I do s'pose he didn't jest know how to get at it, never havin' had no practice.

"Wal, as I said, we decided that somethin' orter to be done, an' it kinder seemed to rest with me. I was president of the sewin' circle that year an' all, so bime by I sorter pulled Tryphosy off in a

corner, an' I says, says I: 'Tryphosy, hain't Zekle asked you yit?' 'No,' says she, a-bustin' right out a-cryin'. 'He hain't, Mis' Bassett, an' I declare I dunno as he's ever goin' to.' I comforted her up the best I could, but all the time I was sayin' over an' over to myself, 'Wal, Hepsey Bassett, there's a stent all basted for you, sure enough. Brace right up now an' do it.'"

Si chuckled, but I hustled right on.

"So after supper, when the young folks was a-playin' games, I walked right over to where Zekle was a-stannin' off to one side, sorter watchin' Tryphosy—she was in the centre of the circle then, with the others all round her; an' she looked reel well, jest as a humbly person sometimes will, for her hair was fixed up reel nice, an' she had a spandy new pink gingham on —I didn't dare to stop, even to ketch my breath, so I hunched him in the side, an' says I, 'Zekle,' says I, 'do you mean to marry Tryphosy?' 'Why, yes, Hepsey,' says he. 'Course I do. Why not?' 'Wal, then,' says I, 'for the lan' sakes, Zekle, why don't you ask her?' I felt as if I'd taken my life in my hands, I will confess, for Zekle wa'n't usually one that would stan' no interfering; but land o' Goshen, you can't never tell how folks will take a thing 'cept that it's al-

wuz the other way from what you do expect. He jest looked sorter dazed like for a minute, an' then he turned an' walked right over to where Tryphosy was a-stannin' in the middle of the game. 'Tryphosy,' says he, 'will you have me?' You could 'a' knocked me down with a feather, an' I dessay I wa'n't as beat as Tryphosy, but in jest a minute she looked up an' smiled. 'Why, yes, Zekle,' says she.

"Wal, I feel sorter 'shamed to own up what comes next, seein' 'twas a sewin' circle, an' I was president an' everythin', to say nothin' of him an' her both bein' perfessors—but the young folks sorter grabbed hands an' danced around 'em in a ring as they stood there. I dare persoom to say 'twas wrong, an' I shouldn't 'a' let it go on. But there, 'twas all done in a minute, an' it did sorter ease up the stiffness wonderful. It did look reel sorter pretty too, though I wouldn't want Mis' Blodgett to hear I said so."

I had to stop then to ketch my breath, so Si got his chanst at last. "Same old tricks, Hepsey," says he slappin' his knee. "Same old tricks. That Matrimony Bureau hain't no new idee, is it? But Tryphosy's still an old maid an' Zeke's still bachin' it for himself. Did they stop right there, Hepsey?"

"Oh, no, after that things seems to move along faster'n usual if anything—I s'pose then Tryphosy felt free to put her shoulder to the wheel an' she was well on with her bedquilts an' rag carpets besides. She'd go over an' sit an' braid rugs while Zekle worked, an' it did seem to make him hammer a sight faster.

"So pretty soon the house was all done, an' he an' Tryphosy they decided to be married right in their own fore room; an' I s'pose there was where the trouble begun, for 'Pride goeth before a fall,' Scripter says. Zekle decided that none o' Tryphosy's rag cargets, neat as they was, was pretty enough to be married on. He'd got to have a bran' new ingrain clear from Typhoon. So he tackled up one mornin' an' him an' Tryphosy they spent the hull day in Typhoon a-buyin' of it. It was harnsum, I will give in; a kinder yaller-buff ground with bunches o' flowers on it bigger'n a bushel-basket. Why, some of them red roses alone was big as yer head an' blue ones too, even bigger. It did seem as if man could improve on nater when he put his mind to it.

"They got me to come over an' look at it when they got it home, an' Tryphosy begun a-layin' of it down to let me see how it went. She put it down lengthways of the room, o' course, but

someway Zekle he didn't like it. 'That's the wrong way, Tryphosy,' says he. 'It orter go crossways o' the room.' 'No, indeed,' says she, an' she turned to me. Of course I agreed with her, 'cause it was right, an' besides, I b'lieve in wimmen stannin' by their own sect. O' course that made Zekle sotter than ever in his way, an' then the schoolma'am popped up in Tryphosy, an' she said she wouldn't have it no way but what was right. An' then they begun to argufy, an' o' course argufyin' never helped no fuss in the world; it alwuz makes 'em wuss, an' so 'twas with this—they both got their dander up, an' bime by Tryphosy says, says she: 'Wal, I'll never be married on this carpet unless it lays lengthways of the room,' says she. 'Wal,' says Zekle, 'I don't propose to be bossed by no wimmen folks,' says he, 'an' I sha'n't never be married on this carpet unless it goes crossways o' this room.' With that he put on his hat, an' she grabbed her sunbunnet, an' off they both started for home, leavin' me there a-starin' at that carpet.

"An' you may be s'prised, Si, but that was reelly the end of it all. We neighbours all tried our hand at it, an' we argufied with Zekle, an' we argufied with Tryphosy, but it never done the least mite o' good. An' bime by the hull village

got divided on the subject o' that carpet. Folks talked lengthways an' crossways till you couldn't see straight, an' the wimmen called Zekle an old Betty, an' the men folks said they was glad one woman had found out she couldn't rule the roost, anyway. I pretty nigh tore up every carpet in my house an' lived on bare floors, so't the subject wouldn't come up.

"An' all this time Zekle an' Tryphosy didn't come no nearer makin' up. They'd speak onct in a while, but they'd alwuz git on the subject o' that carpet, an' neither one would give in an inch. Land, I dunno which was the most mulish, but either one would take a prize.

"So there that house stands, everythin' all ready for housekeepin' except that store carpet a-layin' there all rolled up in the middle o' the floor, an' she a-livin' down the road a piece an' a-teachin' school acrost the way from Zekle's year in an' year out."

"Sho now," says Si, "dew tell, Hepsey. Wal, I am beat. Zeke told me onct that was an empty tenant house o' hisn an' o' course I took it all for corn. Ain't that an awful waste? Say, Hepsey, you hadn't never orter 'a' let 'em outer your clutches, that's what."

"I don't s'pose I had," says I, "but land, Si,

I didn't know as much about human nater then as I do now. Folks is a sight like hens. Cows, now, you could start up the lane an' bime by they'd land in the barn all right; but hens, you've got to shoo 'em every single minute till they git into the coops an' then clap the door right onto 'em."

Si nodded his head two or three times. "That's so, Hepsey," says he, "that's true as preachin'." Then he kinder chawed it over for a spell, on that straw o' hisn. "Hepsey," says he, at last, "the coop's still there, ain't it, an' Zeke an' Tryphosy's still runnin' round the barnyard. I'll bet you could shoo 'em in yet; by the great horn spoon, Hepsey, I'll bet you could."

"Stuff an' nonsense, Si Bartlett," says I. "What you talkin' about?"

"Coops," says Si, "Zeke an' Tryphosy's coops," an' then he haw-hawed till they must 'a' heard him in Halifax.

Bime by he sobered down.

"Say," says he, "I'd like to see that carpet. D'you s'pose we could git in?"

"I dunno," says I; "the house has been locked for twenty year. I'd kinder like to, too, but mercy on us, I wouldn't ask Zeke Ashley for that key no more'n 's if it was kewpons."

Si chawed t'other end of his straw. "Hepsey," says he, "I'm quite a hand at tinkerin' around, you know; mebbe I could work it without speakin' to Zeke."

"Oh, no," says I. "You mustn't do nothin' like that, Si Bartlett. Why, you'd be liable to be took up for breakin' an' enterin'. You'd have to git at it before daybreak, too, or you'd git ketched. I sha'n't uphold you for a minute."

Jest then we overtook Mary Martha Spooner on her way home from A'nt Sophi' Pierce's, an' we give her a lift as fur as our folkses, so no more was said. I s'posed, o' course, that that was the end o' the matter, but while I was doin' up the breakfast work next mornin' in come Si an' set down in the red rocker an' says, "It's a harnsum carpet, an' no mistake."

"Has it kep' good?" says I, before I thought.

"First rate," says he.

"No mildew?" says I.

"Not a mite," says he.

"Si Bartlett," says I, "I don't b'lieve you know mildew when you see it. It's twenty year," says I.

"Wal, mebbe I don't," says he. "It takes women folks fur huntin' trouble. Think likely you'd orter step over an' give it a squint yourself."

I looked at him sharp, but there wa'n't a sign

of a grin on his face. "I dunno," says I. "It don't reelly seem jest right, an' yet——"

"Zeke Ashley's jest gone over to the Corners with a load o' potaters," says Si. "I seen him go by jest now."

Wal, the upshot of it was that I threw my old shawl over my head an' Si an' I trailed down the road an' into that little house like two thieves. I expected every minute somethin' would ketch us, but there didn't.

We went all through the house, an' everything was in tip-top shape, considerin'. Zeke had built it first rate, o' course, an' 'twas on a little hummock, so there wa'n't much dampness. It did seem a sin an' a shame to have it all wasted on spiders. An' 'specially that harnsome store carpet. The roses didn't look quite so big an' bloomin' as I remembered of 'em, but land o' liberty, they could still beat nater all holler. An' Si was right, there wa'n't a spot of mildew on it; they'd left it all tied up so careful on the fore room floor.

We couldn't stay long, 'twas so cold, but we'd seen enough to set us both to thinkin', an' after we got home we set down in front o' the kitchen stove an' thrashed it out, but we couldn't neither of us see daylight.

An' then Emeline come home with the mail an' I see Providence was in it, for there was a letter from my darter Sarah Maria enclosin' an advertisement. An' the advertisement, if you'll believe it, was from some folks that would make over your old carpets for you into rugs, not a seam in 'em, they says, I spotted that in perticular; an' then they told you how to fix your floors around the edges so they'd look all right where the rug didn't go—a poor folksy way o' doin', thinksed I—but law, I didn't have no time to be a-pickin' an' choosin'.

After dinner I showed the advertisement to Si.

"Si," says I, "we've both laid ourselves liable to the law for breakin' an' enterin' now," says I. "Are you willin' to go the whole figger an' steal Zeke's an' Tryphosy's good carpet offen their front room floor an' send it away to have it made over into a rug?"

"Rug?" says Si, kinder dubersome. "What's the sense o' that, Hepsey? Rugs is kinder cold an' slippery for a fore room, to my way o' thinkin'. My darter up to Pikesburg has one in the middle of her fore room an' others strung around the entry, an' they look kinder half dressed an' poverty struck to me."

"Me too," says I; "jest what I say, Silas,

but I guess it's the best we can do for 'em, for there can't be no lengthways or crossways to a square rug," says I, "so we'll have it made that way, an' then they can flop it around to suit 'em, turn an' turn about, an' never know which from t'other."

Si banged the arm o' my rocker till I scrinched for it. "Hepsey," says he, "time an' agin I've said it, an' time an' agin I've got to. You air the beateree—you sartainly air—the—beateree!"

Wal, as luck would have it, they was a donation to the meetin'-house that night an' Emeline an' Lisha was both goin', but I don't go out much nights nohow, an' Si said he had to drop into the store to see Himie Bennett, so we had a good chance to steal our carpet an' do it up in paper. Si hid it in the barn till he could git it off over to Typhoon to send unbeknownst, an' land sakes, I was glad enough when 'twas outer the house. Nobody need never be scairt o' my turnin' a thief in my old age. It's too scary an' worrisome a job.

Wal, our order was the first from our part of the country, so they hustled around an' got the rug back in double quick time eenymost afore Si had got the floor fixed over—done as he had to

on the sly—an' dear me suz a day, but I was sick as a cat when I laid eyes on it. Them beautiful blue an' red an' yaller roses had all been ground up fine an' made over into an old hit an' miss rag rug like my grandmother used to weave, nothin' but hash meat you might say, except for a band of humbly green around the edge. I was clean kaflummuxed.

"Wal, Si Bartlett," says I, "this ain't your mess, an' 'tain't my mess exactly but it's a mess fast enough an' we might jest as well make a clean breast of it an' face the music first as last. You take this back to the house on the wheelbarrer an' then go an' git Zeke Ashley to come over here. He's been threatenin' to help you tinker that grindstone many a long day an' you tell him I've jest balked this afternoon an' said I'd got to have some knives sharpened. I'll set by the winder an' holler to Tryphosy as she goes by."

Wal, mebbe I didn't pass through a tryin' season there with Tryphosy before the men folks come. Land, it didn't seem as if nothin' had happened in a month o' Sundays that was worth talkin' about an' Tryphosy was all in a tiffick to know what I'd called her in for. Mercy me, I never was so glad to see Zeke Ashley before nor

sence for I knew I never could relish my vittles again till I got that job over with.

"Zeke an' Tryphosy," says I, as soon as ever he struck the door-mat, "I've got somethin' to tell you. I've been wantin' you to git married for twenty year off an' on, an' the other day I stuck my finger in your pie, same as I ortn't ter an' got burned jest as I'd orter. I had Si steal the fore room carpet out of your house an' we sent it away to be made into a rug, so't couldn't have no lengthways nor crossways, an' it's back now an' it looks—it looks—wal, I'm goin' to take you right over to see it."

"My beautiful store carpet?" says Tryphosy, primmin' up her lips.

"The same," says I, gittin' my shawl. "I ain't got a word to say for myself, an' neither has Si, but you jest come along."

"How'd you git it?" says Zeke. "I've kerried that key in my pants pocket for twenty year an' here 'tis now."

"Didn't know I was first cousin to a lock picker, did ye?" says Si. Men folks can joke, seems if, in the face of death itself. Zeke kinder laughed then, but Tryphosy didn't, she's women folks.

I watched their faces as we travelled along an'

they seemed to me to grow sotter an' sotter, till I wondered honest how he could keep on walkin' with hisn. Nobody said nothin' though till we got to the house. Then Si opened the door an' we walked in through the front entry into the fore room.

"There," says I, p'intin' to the rag rug, "there 'tis, an' a sight 'tis too. 'Tain't neither crossways nor lengthways anyhow, but that's all I can say for it."

Zeke kinder leaned up agin the what-not an' said nothin', but Tryphosy dropped down on the tête an' bust out a-cryin'. "My be-you-tiful pink an' blue roses," she boohooed. "Oh, dear, oh, dear!"

Zeke turned around an' glared at me till it's a wonder I didn't shrivel in my tracks. Then he walked across the room an' patted her shoulder kinder soothin'. "There, there, Tryphosy," says he, "never mind now! I'll buy you a new one, a reg'lar posey bed," says he, "ef you won't go to cryin' no more. I see one in front of a store in Typhoon t'other day."

Tryphosy kinder smiled an' wiped her eyes. "All wove in one piece?" says she.

"Yes," says Zeke, "an' square. Will you stand up an' git married on that kind?" says he.

Tryphosy gasped an' then she flushed up till she looked 'most like that girl in the circle years ago. "Why—why, yes, Zekle," says she, jest as she did then.

I couldn't stand it no longer. "Wal," says I, "ef you've got to be mad at somebody I'm glad an' thankful it's me an' not each other no longer. Come on, Si, let's be steppin' home."

Zeke looked at me kinder dazed like. "Mad?" says he, "at you, Hepsey? Who?"

"Who?" says I sarcastic. "Mebbe I'm mistook in the person, not havin' my strong specs on, that was A'nt Plenty Allen's, but I thought 'twas a man named Zeke Ashley that was a-lookin' at me as if he could bite a tenpenny nail in two."

"Sho, now, Hepsey," says Zeke. "Is that so? Wal, don't take it to heart, will ye? Mebbe I was kinder riled at you for a minute for makin' Tryphosy cry."

Ef that wa'n't jest like a man! Makin' her cry himself for twenty year over a broken heart an' then maddin' up like that 'cause she was sheddin' a few hullsome tears over a rag rug. I didn't say nothin' though. What was the use? I turned to Tryphosy. "An' what about you?" says I. Tryphosy laughed.

"Ef you'd been perched up on a high horse for twenty year," says she, "I guess likely you'd be anything but mad at somebody that shoved up a horse-block for you to step down on comfortable. They wa'n't reel easy settin', was they, Zeke?"

Zeke laughed an' then Si an' I did too. Land o' Goshen I never was so glad to get anything offen my chest in this world.

"I'll pay for the old carpet," says I. "I can use the rug up in the north chamber, I guess."

"No, you can't," says Zeke. "We need that rug for—for—somewheres ourselves, don't we, Tryphosy? Can't no money buy that rug away from us, Hepsey. I'm kinder lottin' on gittin' married on it after all, if Tryphosy's willin'."

"Wal, then," says I, "the only thing that I see is for me to give you a weddin' supper, ef you'll call that square."

"Square," says Zekle, "or round. I don't care which you call it, Hepsey, jest so you don't have no lengthways nor crossways to it."

"Glory hallelujah," says I. "No, there won't be. Come on, Si. I'll bet Emeline'll git there now afore we do."

X

THE DOUBLE WEDDING

SI could hardly hold in till we got onto the door stun.

"Hepsey," says he reproachful as we stepped down, "you're dretful close-mouthed seems to me. You never breathed an earthly breath to me about that weddin' supper."

"How could I," says I, "when I didn't know an earthly breath about it myself? I've told you time an' agin about Minervy, hain't I? Wal, that was her. I had to make up to Zeke an' Tryphosy some way for their actin' so harnsum about that lookin' rug, an' this seemed the best way. Do you think, tho', Si, that mebbe Elvine'll think I'm slightin' her? I don't want to hurt nobody's feelin's."

Si shook his head. "I dunno, Hepsey," says he, "I dunno, an' that's a fact." Then he chawed his straw for a spell.

"Say, look here," says he, all to onct. "Don't folks sometimes double up on weddin's an' such like? Couldn't you double up on their supper, someways?"

"Si Bartlett," says I, stoppin' right still in my tracks, "for a man you reelly have 's much gumption 's ever I see. 'When she flings, she flings,' has always been my motto, for company anyhow, an' that way I can see both of them jobs finished up good an' the thread fastened. I've been gittin' kinder worried lately for fear Nate was hangin' back for Elvine's book an' o' course she can't write po'try any faster'n things happen."

Wal, the upshot of it was that Elvine an' Nate Skinner an' Zeke an' Tryphosy had what was called a double weddin' up around our folkses, on the afternoon an' evenin' of Memorial Day. I kinder hung off on the date for I knew 'twould make talk—same as it did—but land, 'twas the one an' only thing the two couples agreed on so I dassent hold out about it. That was the curiousest thing about that double weddin'; they wouldn't do one single earthly thing alike. At first 'twas planned that they was to be married to their own houses an' then come to our folkses to supper, but as soon as Elvine an' Nate heard tell about Zeke an' Tryphosy, they decided they wanted to be married to my house where the supper was. Wal, that didn't make no difference to me as I had to have my house all tore up anyways.

Then the next step was that Tryphosy wanted afternoon an' Elvine evenin', she said 'twas "so much more becomin'." An' so on 'twas till I felt as if I'd been ground betwixt the upper an' nether millstones as Scripter says. Finally, I jest washed my hands of the hull matter an' let 'em do as they liked. The only p'int I was sot firm on was askin' the company. There I raised my Ebenezer an' nobody could move me. I wouldn't have a soul asked that had been married to their present consort more'n a few months, an' them that was onhitched preferred anyways.

Nobody understood why of course except Si Bartlett an' even he had to have things explained to him.

"Land o' Goshen," says I, "Si Bartlett, anybody'd s'pose you'd never hern tell of my Matrimony Bureau nor of the effects it's s'posed to have on folks to go to weddin's, let alone double ones which orter have double the effects. The onmarried folks of Hicksville Center, widows an' widowers, old maids an' bachs, is goin' to have one grand onhindered chanst to think o' the sentiment an' po'try side of matrimony without no old married folks a-settin' around to spile po'try with cold facts. I won't even have Lisha

an' Emeline around. You can carry them their supper in a tin pail."

Si laughed fit to split, but land, I didn't care so long as he kep' the Matrimony Bureau to himself an' made himself useful round the house. There was a power o' work to do I tell you but I had Hitty May over from Typhoon to lend a hand an' Philury Jane Stubbs, too; they was both on 'em perky an' bridey enough to help the cause besides bein' master hands for work. An' then as a last resort I went an' got Ketury Slocum for I knew she'd be as full of idees as an egg is o' meat. I felt justified in askin' her an' Vally both for it wa'n't but a few months since their Di'mond Weddin's an' they was a-livin' along like two young turtle doves.

Wal, sir, I needed all the help I could rake an' scrape, I tell you, for between 'em they wanted the run o' the hull place from stem to gudgeon. Elvine wanted everything done as if she was one of them Vanderbillion girls a-marryin' of a dook, so she had to have the spare chamber het up for her to dress in an' the fore room decked out with flowers an' streamers an' other dewdabs, till you wouldn't 'a' known the place.

I don't hold with such fandangoes myself but Hitty May admired to help her an' law I don't

never s'pose Elvine'll be married but onct. They fixed a big weddin'-bell across one corner an' a sorter little hen-coop for the minister to stand in, an' even tuned up the old organ that Hitty May's mother used to play on when she was a girl. Land o' Goshen, you never see such goin's on! An' after they was all safely married they was to stand up in a row an' shake hands an' et cetry an' thank folks for their presents, I s'pose.

You'd orter seen Zeke Ashley when they told him about it. "None of that tarnal foolishness for me, Hepsey; Nate Skinner can do as he wants to," says he. "Tryphosy an' me'll set down in the settin'-room an' talk to the neighbours," says he, "but we ain't to the time o' life when pink an' white paper streamers an' posies suits our complexions," says he. "We look more like a sheaf o' wheat," says he.

I hain't no idee that Zeke meant anything by that, but Hitty May an' Ketury fairly grabbed the words out of his mouth an' begun to fix up the settin'-room till it looked like a Harvest Home, all straw an' corn an' pampas grass an' et cetry.

I didn't have no time to argufy tho' for Philury Jane an' me was a-tacklin' the vittles out in

the kitchen, makin' good old-fashioned election cake to please Zeke an' Tryphosy, an' dressin' it up with doves an' wreaths an' such truck made out o' frostin' for Elvine, besides all the reg'lar things that go to make up a good supper. Mebbe 'twa'n't somethin' of a job!

The installment plan weddin', as Roscoe Conklin' called it, begun to come off about four o'clock over to Zeke's an' Tryphosy's house. They'd bought that elegant new rug over to Typhoon, but when it come to the p'int Zeke wouldn't be married on nothin' but that old hit or miss one that I was responsible for; said he'd planned years ago to be married on that carpet an' he guessed mebbe it hadn't changed no more than him an' Tryphosy. I declar' for it, I never see anybody so betwoddled over anything as he was over that old carpet; h'isted it onto a wheelbarrer finally an' trundled it up to my house when the folks come up for supper.

I'd gone on ahead to see about things an' you can figger to yourself what I felt like when he come in an' dumped it on my settin'-room floor an' said he an' Tryphosy'd like to set on it. "Go ahead, Zeke," says I. "There's no accountin' for tastes, o' course, but I'll be glad enough to save my new settin'-room carpet. I'll bet a cooky

somebody'll upset one o' the Grange boards onto the floor. They always do."

Elvine wouldn't set down to eat with the rest of us, she didn't think 'twas proper so short a time before enterin' the married state, an' she didn't think Nate ort to neither, but there she struck a snag. Nate Skinner wa'n't goin' to run no risk of losin' a good meal o' vittles by not settin' down along with the rest while 'twas hot, an' I guess there wa'n't a man in the place that blamed him. I didn't myself, an' neither did Roscoe Conklin', who was jest tickled to death over the hull thing anyway.

He helped wait on table, an' he'd come out jest a-bustin' with laugh an' say: "Grandma Bassett, you'll have to make more tea. Bridegroom Nate's jest took coffee, so Bridegroom Zeke's got to have tea;" or, "Say, what you got that's jest the opposite o' chicken pie? Bridegroom Ashley's jest took a second helpin', an' it comes hard on Skinner, for he wants some, too, but he thinks he'd orter have something different."

The vittles was good, though, I guess, for they all cleaned up their plates fast enough. I told Roscoe Conklin' to lay aside Mis' Pease's so't I could see what she left, for she's generally pernickity as they make 'em, an' there wa'n't nothin'

on it but bone an' a little crumb o' cake, jest enough for manners. Loviny Spooner, too, she's another that picks at her vittles, but she only left a little skin an' two small scraps of pie, jest to show she was more delicate than Mis' Pease. I declare there wasn't hardly enough left to save hot for Elvine an' the waiters an' Hitty May who was up-stairs helping her into her new dress.

Land, I wish you could 'a' seen Elvine when she come down-stairs. She looked nearer like a ship under full sail than anything 't I ever see on dry land. Her dress was made of shiny white paper cambric all covered over with sights an' sights of white tarlton; looked like mosquiter nettin' to me, but Elvine said 'twas tarlton. She had a veil o' the same stuff all billowin' over her, an' she carried the most sizable bokay that was ever seen in Hicksville Center. Everybody's flower garden in the village had been called on, an' they was stuck in place on a toaster-an'-broiler though I wouldn't never want Elvine to know I let on about it, for 'twas all covered up round the edges with a ruffle of white shelf paper. It must have been a tough job to carry it, but Elvine done it with a smilin' face. Hitty May had come down first an' she was a-pumpin' away at the organ when Elvine hove in sight. Nate was so over-

come when he seen her that he jest stood still like a stone image, but she stopped in the doorway an' beckoned till he sensed what was expected on him an' went over. Then they locked arms an' paraded over to the hen-coop gate where the minister was waitin' for 'em. 'Twa'n't Elder Pease; Elvine thought he wa'n't nigh fancy enough for her, so they got the Pisculopian one from over to Typhoon. He was a good eater, too, ministers usually is, uncommon.

Elvine meant to go the hull figger, I tell you, so she'd rigged up one o' the meetin'-house footstools for her an' Nate to kneel down onto. An' Nate was so kinder stiff about it he got over the edge at first an' was dretful tottlish for a minute or two, but fortnitly, Elvine's quite considerable heftier 'n he is, an' she balanced the stool all right.

I hadn't never heard the Pisculopians marry anybody before, for folks at the Center usually take it more solemn, but land 'twas excitin' an' intrustin' for once, though I should think 'twould be dretful kind of risky for common folks. I fairly held my breath when the minister asked if anybody had any objections to their gittin' married, for I'd hern tell that Bub Skinner was mad as hops at his pa's marryin' again, an' I

didn't know but he'd speak up or Philander'd try to cut in an' git Elvine, but I s'pose they was too took aback to take advantage.

I know I was, a little further along, when 'twas my turn to answer. I wa'n't expectin' no more questions an' I was so flabbergasted when he asked who give this woman to be married to this man that I didn't say a word for a minute an' a second cousin of Elvine's from over to Necropolis, that hain't done a thing for her for years, put in his oar an' says "*Me.*"

I didn't let that pass, though, I tell you. "You didn't neither," says I. "I'll leave it to Elvine herself if I wa'n't the one. I don't mean jest this weddin' supper neither, though that has been work enough, goodness knows."

The second cousin started to say somethin', an', if you'll believe it, Elvine turned around an' shook her head at me ; I s'pose likely she thought 'twas him ; but Si Bartlett wa'n't goin' to let me be put on in my own house an' he spoke right up.

"It was Hepsey," says he ; "I can swear to it afore a justice o' the peace if necessary an' nobody need try to dispute it. If Hepsey'd had her way all through mebbe ——"

"Sh," says I, cuttin' in, for I was afeared he'd git to goin' an' let the hull cat out of the bag.

An' then the minister says "Silence" to the second cousin an' the weddin' went on.

I was right on deck for any more questions that was comin' to me, but I guess the parson didn't dare to risk any more for fear somebody else'd answer that hadn't orter.

I ain't one to bear grudges, though, so I went right up afterwards an' shook hands all round even to the second cousin—an' then I asked Elvine to come out into the other room an' eat her supper. She looked as holler as a rain barrel but she stuck firm to that weddin' bell.

"Oh, no, Mis' Bassett," says she. "I'll shake hands with all the neighbours first," says she, "an' then you can bring me in a little tray right here," says she. "I ain't hungry for mortal food," says she, "but I s'pose I'd orter eat a little to please Mr. Skinner."

Nate kinder grinned sheepish so I scurried out into the kitchen an' fixed up a good tray full an' then I sent it in by Roscoe Conklin' an' told him to draw up A'nt Plenty's little sewin' table for Elvine to eat on. Folks took the hint an' dropped away for a little while all except Roscoe Conklin'. He stood there as if he was glued to the spot, a-watchin' every mouthful that Elvine took. Nate was eatin' too but he didn't pay no

'tention to him, jest stood an' gazed at her. Elvine was kinder flattered at first an' quirked up her little finger dretful stylish, but bime by I thought she didn't like it, so I beckoned for him to come away. He didn't budge, so I called Hitty May an' sent her for him.

"Why, Grandma Bassett," says he, flyin' up, "now you've made me lose count an' you'll never know jest how much that bride et. She was jest on her forty-seventh mouthful when I left."

Roscoe Conklin' is such a limb I never can tell whether he means things or not, but I made as if I took it all for corn.

"Wal, you let her alone," says I, "an' don't spile her appetite that way. You can save the plate afterwards if you want to. I know jest how much I put on. You go along now an' help the other folks enjoy themselves."

He ducked one of them dancin'-school bows of hisn an' off he went like a shot. An' land, I dunno what we ever should 'a' done without him an' Hitty May. Weddin's at the Center is usually kinder starched up affairs an' most as solemn as a funeral, but them two got things to movin' till you'd most 'a' thought 'twas an old-fashioned huskin' bee or such. I never dropped even a hint to him about my kind of a party but I'll bet

a cooky he guessed, for he's as smart as a steel trap, Roscoe Conklin' is, an' he went right in an' paired 'em off right an' left. He got 'em to playin' games, choosin' games like clap in an' clap out an' such like, an' then he got 'em to singin' an' fixed 'em up in twos with the same book. Them old maids an' widows, to say nothin' of the men folks, hadn't had such a good time in years.

Philury Jane, though, took me off in the kitchen an' laboured with me about it. She said she didn't think 'twas no place for her a deaconess nor yet for me, that had been one, to be aidin' an' abettin' no such goin's on.

"Philury Jane," says I, "mebbe I wouldn't neither ef I was you, but I've got an Objeck an' that Objeck justifies it."

"Oh," says Philury, "missions, you mean, A'nt Hepsey? Is it Asia or Africky or the Philippian Islands?"

"It's home," says I. "An' it ain't for you to speak, Philury Jane, for you was an Objeck onct yourself an' not so unbeknownst either. I'll tell you all about it some day when I've got time. I've got to go in now an' carry the cake for Elvine to cut. Tryphosy won't tech it."

Philury looked at that cake sad like. "How you have changed, A'nt Hepsey!" says she.

"Mebbe I have," says I, "mebbe I have. Gittin' intrusted doin' for other folks does kind o' wake ye up, that's a fact. You go on now an' lead the way to Elvine's weddin' bell."

That cake sartainly was the masterpiece of the hull affair. It had took sights an' sights of gumption to cover it over with all the folderols Elvine wanted, but I felt well repaid when she carved the dove outer the top an' give it to Nate to hold till she could git it home an' put it under a glass case.

Folks saved their posies an' things to set on their manteltry pieces an' what-nots, but Zeke Ashley pried his off with his jack-knife an' threw it in the coal hod. Tryphosy was mortified for she knew I seen him an' she whispered somethin' to him so he turned round to me.

"No, I ain't insultin' nobody," says he. "You know better than that, don't ye, Hepsey? Hepsey's a sensible womern an' a good neighbour an' she's the last one to expect me to swaller down any tomfool messes to please Nate Skinner an' Elvine Higgins."

"Land yes, Zeke," says I. "I relish good common sense as well as you do, but land, we've

got to make allowances for folks that writes poetry books or marries 'em."

"I s'pose so, I s'pose so," says Zeke, kinder grudgin' like; "the underpinnin's first rate, anyhow, onct ye git the French roof off, real good old election cake same as mother an' grandmother used to make."

Seein' Zeke an' Tryphosy was contented, I meandered off into the fore room to see how the other fresh married folks was gittin' on, for there seemed to be a good deal of a takin' on an' a teeheein' in the wind.

'Twas as I might 'a' guessed. Roscoe Conklin' was to the bottom of it. Unbeknownst to me, he an' Hitty May had slipped some o' them fortune dew dabs into the cake, an' one after another they was pullin' of 'em out, one a penny an' another a ring, but nary a thimble in the lot so fur, tho' everybody was eatin' fast to see what they'd run onto. Bime by they got kinder scared for fear somebody'd swallered it an' everybody begun kinder chokin' an' feelin' o' their throats to see.

"Roscoe Conklin'," says I, drawin' him to one side, "what did ye put in that cake?"

"Six rings, Grandma Bassett," says he, "warranted solid gold to the ten cent store, an' three

Lincoln pennies 'cause love is twice as good as money."

"Nary a thimble?" says I.

"Nary," says he. "When you an' me gits through with this town there hain't goin' to be no old maids nor baches in it, so what's the use?" says he, an' then he winked at me till there wa'n't an eyelash to be seen on that side. Roscoe Conklin' is as smart as a steel trap, an' there ain't no gittin' around it.

Wal, I stepped back, an' we counted up the hull nine things, so everybody begun to feel better an' stop a-swallerin' every few seconds.

Then Elvine made a speech in poetry, and so did Nate, a kind of a dialogue—Elvine wrote it o' course—an' then they said seein' 'twas gittin' so late they'd better be startin' on. It was most ten o'clock an' that's a fact.

Then Elvine started up-stairs an' Hitty May hollered, "Throw your bokay for the next bride," an' she did, forgettin' all about the toaster, an' like to killed Genesis Slocum, at least it would have if it had hit her in the head like 'twas aimed for. I yelled though, an' Squire Ezry Porter reached up an' ketched it in time. It must 'a' hurt his hand like fury, but he bore it like a man

an' turned an' handed it to Genesis with a flourish. Roscoe Conklin' started to clap an' then everybody did an' land, I dunno but that'll be a go for they both looked smilin' as a basket o' chips even tho' red as fire.

Nate had a bran new buggy waitin' outside an' the boys had put sleigh-bells on it, an' we piled in him an' Elvine, all in their weddin' togs, an' the dove an' the weddin' bell that Elvine wouldn't be parted from, an' some extry garlands an' I dunno what all. Somebody'd reelly orter gone along to unpack 'em, but there, ye can't be a special Providence for everybody to onct.

Zeke lit his lantern an' loaded the rug onto the wheelbarrer an' he an' Tryphosy trailed off scornful right in front of Nate's buggy, so he had to walk his horse every step o' the way down the lane.

Wal, mebbe I wa'n't glad when the last one of 'em was gone. I've always been a great hand for company an' so was the deacon, but all the afternoon an' evenin' is quite a stretch for a woman o' my years, to say nothin' of all the days beforehand ; an' the minute Lisha locked the front door I sunk into my rocker clean beat out.

Roscoe Conklin' rushed right off into the kitchen an' come back with two plates, one

heaped up full with chicken pie an' things, an' the other with jest a few orts on it.

"Grandma Bassett," says he, "which will ye do first, see how much the Skinner bride et or eat a snack o' somethin' yourself?"

"First of all," says I, "I have a good mind as ever I had to eat to take my slipper to you, you sassy boy. Where'd you git that white breast meat? I looked for some more for Elvine an' couldn't find it."

"I found it in on the top pantry shelf," says Roscoe Conklin', "where I hid it away for you, Grandma Bassett. Hitty May's jest het it up now an' you orter eat it." Now what could you do with a boy like that? Roscoe Conklin' always says he took such a shine to me was why he wanted to git Hitty May, but then, o' course I don't more'n half believe him.

"You hadn't orter 'a' done that but mebbe I could take a bite or two since it's het up," says I. "But don't ye dast to go countin' my mouthfuls, Roscoe Conklin'. Did any of you folks notice who went home with who?"

"Yes siree bob," says Si, "I did, an' by Jinks, Hepsey, who do you think they was? Himie Bennett an' Loviny Spooner for one, an' Old Man Bowers an' Aurorer Bory Alice for an-

other an' Philander Spooner an' Widder Em Blossom."

"An' Squire Ezry took the one he saved the life of," says Roscoe Conklin'. "He wa'n't going to run no more resks with that deadly bokay."

"An' Genesis had her pa an' ma along too," says I. "Mercy me, I shouldn't wonder if that would be a match."

"An' nobody knows how many more after they got out of our lane," says Roscoe Conklin'.

"Jehosaphat," says Si, "I never thought o' that. I wish I'd walked down the road a piece with Zeke an' Tryphosy. Is it too late now, Hepsey?"

"Too late?" says I, lookin' at the clock. "Why, it's goin' on eleven o'clock this minute. It's too late for any good Christian to be out o' bed. Why, I hain't been up so late I dunno when. Scatter now, all on you. Philury Jane's finished the dishes an' gone up long ago."

Roscoe Conklin' turned round at the front entry door an' give me another of them winks o' hisn. "Pretty good job for one evenin', Grandma Bassett," says he. "You an' I'd better go into partnership, I guess."

Si was jest startin' up to the kitchen cham-

ber but he stopped an' hollered back, "Your grandma's got other fish to fry, young man, an' don't you forgit it!" an' then he leaned around the corner an' winked at me even more meanin' than Roscoe Conklin'.

I had to pretend that I didn't know what either on 'em was talkin' about.

"No more double weddin's for me," says I, "if nobody in Hicksville Center never gits married agin." An' what's more, I was so bone tired, I reelly meant it.

XI

HICKSVILLE'S SANE FOURTH

ONCE that Double Weddin' was off my hands I felt as if I could lay back on my oars an' rest a spell. Si said it had reelly orter be called a double back action weddin' for so many couples begun to take notice after it, but they seemed to be doin' pretty well by themselves an' I felt as if I could lay my armour down an' take a sort of a vacation. But land, no, 'twa'n't so to be. Si Bartlett, of all people in the world, couldn't seem to give me a minute's peace, always a-follerin' me up an' a-pesterin' of me about my Matrimony Bureau.

"When are you goin' to set her to work agin?" he'd say, or, "Who are you layin' out to take up to the hitchin'-post next, Hepsey?" I put him off time an' agin, for I do hate to have to explain every breath I draw to some man or other, but land, it wa'n't no earthly use. Next day he'd be at it agin same as ever, so finally I give in.

"Wal," says I, "what bee have you got in

your bunnet, Si? Whose case is it you're so worried about, I'd like to know?"

"Would you," says Si, "honest now, Hepsey, would you? Wal, then I might jest as well tell you first as last. It's my own. Hain't you never thought, Hepsey, that I might like to go an' git spliced agin?"

You could 'a' knocked me over with a bantam's pin feather.

"Wal, I'll be buttered!" says I. "Land sakes alive an' Goshen. How true 'tis that folks don't never know when they're well off!"

Si sot an' leaned his elbows on his knees an' twiddled his old hat around on his fingers, an' there sot I a-lookin' at him.

"Wal," says he, finally, lookin' up, "now you know about it, Hepsey, don't you kinder think mebbe it's your dooty ——"

There she was agin, Dooty, a-tuggin' at my hitch-strap an' pullin' of me out into the road. "Wal, Si," says I, sithin', "mebbe I had orter do somethin'. Jest leave me be till after the doin's is over for the Fourth an' then I'll try to git my mind down onto your case. Jest now it's all took up with the celebration, an' I should think yourn orter be too. Ain't you goin' over to-night to vote for a Sane Fourth?" I knew

that would switch him offen the track if anything could, for Si is clean daft over this Sane Fourth business that's been in all the papers an' he riz right up outer his chair an' waved his hat at me as if he was ketchin' flies.

"You're right, Hepsey," says he, sawin' his arm up an' down. "It's time for Hicksville Center to rise up an' set an example to the rest of the United States an' help that there Sane Fourth movement on to glory. Ain't it jest a sin an' a shame now, the way the youth of this country is a-bein' massacreed an' mauled around by firecrackers an' other ingines of destruction?"

"It is," says I; "there hain't no doubt about it, but you hadn't orter waste all that oratin' an' hifalutin talk on me, Si; you'd better go down to the store an' let it off onto Himie Bennett for he hates like pison, they say, to give up sellin' them ingines you spoke of."

"I will, by Ginger," says Si, clappin' his hat onto his head, an' he was travellin' off down the lane before you could say "Jack Robinson."

Tacklin' Himie Bennett, tho', wa'n't no job at all besides the one I was faced up with. Where under the canopy was I a-goin' to find a wife for Si Bartlett? He wa'n't no man to be put off with skim milk as you might say, an' the cream o'

Hicksville Center had been skum an' skum again by my efforts an' hisn. I did hate, too, not to do things up handsome by Si, bein' Emeline's father so, but land, he'd orter 'a' let me know sooner.

Again an' again I run over in my mind every unmarried woman that I knew, but some way they didn't none on 'em seem jest the ticket for Si. I kinder hoped I'd git a Minervy on the subject, but Minervys hain't never to be counted on, an' so finally after thrashin' the matter over for a week or so I fell back on A'nt Zilphy Gorman an' made up my mind what was "the best I could do."

Roscoe Conklin' has an A'nt Sarah Maria, over to Typhoon, that he's always talkin' about; she's a doctor's widder over there an' very well thought of; 'tain't jest Roscoe Conklin' that says so, everybody speaks well o' Mis' Doctor Wilson. So I kinder sounded Hitty May who was makin' me a little visit while Roscoe was enlargin' the Cape, an' we decided to have him bring her along when he come down to spend the Fourth, for we was lottin' on havin' the biggest doin's this side o' Boston, an' Si was chairman o' the hull celebration an' orter show off well. I kinder thought, too, that bein' a doctor's widder she'd know how

to take care of him anyway, an' be good to him in his old age, an' Si is the kind that takes to a little cossetin' like a duck to water. Most men folks does, I've noticed.

Roscoe got there the night beforehand, but he an' all the rest o' our folks was so took up gittin' ready for the celebration that I had to drive over to the deepo an' git the company myself. I hain't what you call much of a driver, but I can git a horse an' team over the ground if I can sit in the middle of the front seat an' have the free and onhindered use o' my elbows, so I took old Daisy an' went. The minute I laid my eyes on Mis' Dr. Wilson I knew she wa'n't the woman for Si. I dunno what there was about her exactly, unless mebbe she was too dressy, but I reelized right away that I'd made a mistake. 'Twas too late to do anything then o' course; I couldn't dump Roscoe Conklin's a'nt back onto the train, an' anyway I ain't never one to put my hand to the plow an' then turn back, so I follered the furrow right along an' had Tom Martin h'ist her onto the back seat an' turned around an' visited with her as sociable as I could with Daisy actin' skittish as a young colt, the way she always does when I'm a-drivin' of her alone. Si an' Lisha won't never believe how coltish she is.

Mis' Dr. Wilson ain't used to ridin' much, I guess, for she set on the front edge o' the cushion most o' the time, an' acted so near scairt to death that she was dretful hard to visit with, an' I was glad enough when we hove in sight of our folkses, where they was all out in the yard beckonin' for us to hurry up, for o' course Daisy had quieted all down soon as she ketched sight of them. Then they bundled us out quick or you lose it, an' hitched old Daisy double in the hay-rack an' piled us into that, old an' young together, helter skelter, an' baskets an' pails o' vittles wherever there was an inch to spare. Land, I never ketched one good breath between comin' an' goin'.

I set on the front seat with Si, an' I'd planned to have Mis' Dr. Wilson up there, too, so I didn't make no changes, whatever my feelin's, but stowed her right in betwixt us. There was room enough, goodness knows, for Mis' Dr. Wilson is as skinny as a beanpole, but I'll bet her right elbow pretty nigh wore a hole in Si's ribs; her left one did in mine, anyway. She was, though, sights easier to visit with than she'd been comin' over from the deepo an' we was a-talkin' along reel sociable like about the weather an' the pretty prospect over Delight's paster an' et cetry, when all of a sudden Si cut in as perky as a bantam

rooster. He'd s'picioned, I s'pose, that she was his special company, an', anyway, he felt his oats that day, bein' chairman an' all, an' he jest had to show off.

"Hepsey," says he, reprovin' like, "I'm ashamed of you—honest I am. I know full well that the sceneries here to Hicksville Center is picturesque as they make 'em. Folks that has been to the Alps an' Niagry Falls an' Rocky Point has said time an' agin that there wa'n't nothin' to compare with this, but, Hepsey, this hain't no time to talk about paster land an' sich. Don't you know that this is the great an' glorious Fourth, the birthday of the American eagle an' the Republican party an' the—an' the—Center Brass Band. Your very teeth orter be clovin' to the roof o' your mouth with patterotism, an' here you be talkin' about paster lots an' prospects!"

"Law now, Si," says I, mild but sarcastic, "what a pity that we've gone to the expense of hirin' a speaker up from Necropolis when we've got such a nateral-born orator as you be right here in our midst. Your teeth don't seem to be a-clovin' any to speak of, though; I'm kind of afraid they'll be droppin' outer the ruff of your mouth, mebbe. You ain't got reel wonted to them new ones yet, you know."

Si kinder wilted. "Wal," he says, "I'll leave it to Mis' Wilson here if 'tain't a time to be talkin' of eagles an' freedom an' stars an' stripes an' sich, stidder huckleberry patches." I didn't wait to hear from no Mis' Wilson, you better believe.

"I'm glad to hear that now, Si," says I, sorter proddin' around under the front seat with my sun umbrell. "I'm glad enough to hear, Si, that your thoughts is soarin' on high and lofty themes to-day, 'cause I guess that tin pail's gone for sure. I thought I heard a clink about the time you first said eagle." Si Bartlett ain't a-goin' to git on no high horses with me, I tell you, 'specially afore company.

"What tin pail?" says he, fierce.

"Oh, we won't talk about it, Si," says I, soothin' like. "'Twa'n't nothin' much; no eagles' wings nor nothin'!"

"What was in that pail?" yelled Si.

"Sh, sh, Si," said I. "'Twa'n't the stars an' stripes; nothin' but some huckleberry pies I made for the picnic."

"Fresh huckleberry pies?" says he.

"Yes, yes. I managed to git enough out in Delight's paster for two or three yesterday, but I guess we can have our oration jest as well if they be lost. Drive on, Si."

"Wal, I guess not," says he with a tug that brought us all to a standstill. "You git right out now, boys, an' go an' hunt up a tin kittle full of Hepsey's fresh huckleberry pies."

Lisha an' Roscoe Conklin' an' the other men folks in our rack jumped out like a streak o' lightnin', but 'twa'n't long before they was back agin empty handed.

"Wal," says Si when he seen 'em, "you be a fine mess o' punkins, you be. Here, hold these 'ere horses, Lisha, an' I'll go back an' find that kittle."

Jest then I kinder poked my head up from under the seat agin. "Why, here they be, Si, all safe an' sound," says I cheerful. "My umbrell kinder run into my gaiters so't I didn't hear it clink before." Si clambered back into the wagon mad as a hatter, an' fetched old Daisy a cut with the whip that he orter 'a' been ashamed of. I couldn't help givin' Mis' Dr. Wilson a little hunch in the side, jest 'cause she was another woman, but land, she never even turned an' looked at me knowin', let alone nudgin' back.

"Oh, Mr. Bartlett," says she instead, sweeter'n honey an' the honeycomb, "how true, how true that is!"

"What?" says Si, snappish as a hornet.

"Why, what you said jest now, about the Fourth an' patterotism an' sich. It was beautiful," says she, claspin' her hands together. "Do tell me some more of your great thoughts about the day."

If Si had been a cat he'd 'a' purred till you'd thought somethin' was afire; bein' only a man, all he could do was to grin like a Jack-o'-lantern an' kinder swell his chest out an' clear his throat.

Mis' Dr. Wilson waited a minute an' then she tried again. "What, Mr. Bartlett," says she, "what is your opinion of the firecracker?" She's a smart woman, Mis' Dr. Wilson is, an' a good guesser. Si was jest primed about firecrackers, an' he bu'st right out so sudden it kinder scairt her for a minute. "Firecrackers?" says he. "Firecrackers is the biggest curse of this nation. Them an' toy-pistols is its greatest foes. The President of these here United States," says he, bangin' his fist down onto his knee, "orter pass a law makin' of it a corporial offense even to manerfacture 'em, let alone sellin' of 'em an' settin' of 'em off. Firecrackers," says he, "is to me jest what a red-flannin petticoat is to a bull. I could tromple on 'em an' snort around, jest as he does, at the mere sight of 'em. Any perfessor oughter feel that way. I wouldn't

tech to 'em with a ten-foot pole." Mis' Dr. Wilson opened her lips to speak, but I got my oar in first.

"There, there now," says I, soothin' like. "You don't have to. There ain't one to be sold in Hicksville Center to-day, nor yet at the Corners, nor yet at Pride's Crossin', from Dan even to Beersheba, as Scripter says."

"No, siree," says Si, hollerin' again, "not a blamed one!" I don't know whatever ailed him.

"Sh, sh," says I. "There's the Advent minister from the village jest a-turnin' down the lane this minute, an' you a-swearin' like that."

"I don't care a darn if he is," says he, "for here we be most to Thatcher's Grove, an' there's all the other hay-racks, an' it's the great an' glorious an' everlastin' Fourth, an' I don't care who knows it."

I was scairt to hear him go on so. He didn't seem nateral.

"But sane, Si, sane," says I; "don't you for one minute forgit that."

"Be I likely to?" says he, jumpin' down over one wheel an' h'istin' me over the other. "Ain't I the chairman o' the day?" an' with that he dashed off to the platform, leavin' Mis' Dr. Wilson a-screamin' for fear Daisy would run away

with her. Roscoe Conklin' come to the rescue in a minute, but land, what a time they had! She wore one of them hobble skirts you read about an' she couldn't 'a' stepped down off a footstool easy, but I held up the lap robe an' my sun umbrell in front of her an' we done the best we could. We had steps to home, but we'd forgot to bring 'em along.

Then we all walked over to the platform an' the exercises begun. I see then why Si was so excited an' reckless like, for he'd took off his linen duster an' there he was togged out to beat the Dutch. Emeline, for a surprise to me, had cut up an old flag we had up garret into a vest an' necktie an' he had on Granther Slocum's old shiny stovepipe hat. I was proud o' Si, honest I was, but land, I wouldn't have him know it for a farm. He run the program well too, patted the young ones on the head when they come out to speak their pieces, led the singin' as if he was a hull brass band an' then introduced the Honourable Lovejoy Tillinghast from Necropolis in a speech that was at least ten minutes long.

The Honourable Tillinghast done well, I hain't nothin' to say against him, though he did charge a perfectly redickerlous price, ten dollars, an' expenses, an' him comin' all the way from Ne-

cropolis too. But there is them that says an' sticks to it that he wa'n't to be mentioned in the same day with Si. They contend that Si's last speech was more like Dan'l Webster than Dan'l himself was some days. It was a master speech an' no gittin' around it. He kinder la'nched out about firecrackers, same as he was sayin' to Mis' Dr. Wilson, comin' over, an' then all of a sudden, he jest let himself go.

"Therefore," says he, bangin' on the table till the water-pitcher jumped a foot right up into the air, "therefore, feller citizens, it beheaves the United States of America an' it beheaves the commonwealth of Massachusetts, an' it beheaves the county of Talcott an' it beheaves the village of Hicksville Center to leave such like fandangoes to the heathen Chinees, while we jine together as one man an' stomp out this pest of the entire civilized globe—the death-dealin' firecracker."

His voice kinder riz higher on each "beheaves" an' so did he, on his tiptoes till I thought mebbe he was goin' to soar right up like a balloon, but he landed all safe an' sound with a "stomp" on the last "firecracker."

I'll bet the Honourable Tillinghast felt like pretty small pertaters over the clappin' an' yellin' that follered, but Mis' Dr. Wilson rushed

right up an' seized him by the hand, so he didn't have no chance to git lonesome.

I didn't take no time to go up an' congratulate none of 'em, an' lucky enough I didn't, for no sooner had I got well started unpackin' the dinner kittles than over come Roscoe Conklin' an' grabbed me by the apron-strings.

"Grandma," says he, "Orator Bartlett sent me over to tell you to 'hurry up them vittles.' He says 'oratory is dretful weakenin' to the innards.' He's 'got a hole in him as big as a woodchuck,' if I remember right, 'an' the Honourable Tillinghast is so sharkish he could eat a hymn-book.' "

"Mercy me, child," says I, "didn't I cut an' run for these here kittles the minute Si closed his mouth? 'Twas as much as three minutes past the noonin' then an' I see hunger a-stickin' out all over him, though he was too excited for a minute or so to know it himself. You go tell him an' the Honourable Tillinghast to come an' sit right down here to the head of this table. They can go on confisticatin' together, an' I'll give 'em a bite or two on the sly if the Elder's too long winded askin' the blessin'."

The Elder *was* a little lengthy with his blessin', that's a fact, but maybe he thought we needed

extra strength to tackle the vittles before us. Even Si an' the Honourable Tillinghast could only say: "Now this is what you might call a real, genooine, old-fashioned picnic," when they set down to the table, an' when they got up even them two gifted orators was "too full for utterance."

Roscoe Conklin' stayed behind to see that his "Grandma Bassett" got "enough to eat" so he said, but the other men folks lit their pipes an' melted away like dew before the sun, an' land, I didn't blame 'em; I dunno as I should 'a' minded an after-dinner nap myself.

"But women must work since men folks must eat," as Elvine Higgins says in her last poem writ since she became Mis' Elnathan Skinner, so we started in cleanin' up an' washin' dishes, aided an' abetted by Roscoe Conklin' an' Hitty May. We didn't hurry, though, none of us, for we had the hull afternoon afore us an' everythin' was quiet an' peaceful there in the woods, even the birds a-takin' their noonin', seems if.

All to onct, however, the stillness was broke by a distant sound, a sudden kinder crash, an' then another. Mis' Deacon Blodgett raised her head suspicious like an' cocked her good ear around the horizon.

"That's Typhoon!" she sniffed scornful, "a celebratin' the Fourth in their same old wicked way, with fire an' brimstone like Sodom an' Gomorrah. I never did have no commess with Typhoon folks."

Another muffled sound reached us an' then I cocked *my* ear. "That's not over Typhoon way," says I, "nor yet Callicut; besides, it ain't fur enough off. We'd better call the men folks an' have 'em look around a little. Himie Bennett is jest enough of a limb of Satan to have sent off an' got a mess of firecrackers on the sly if some of them little imps wanted him to. Let's git the men folks."

The men folks, however, was nowhere to be found, nor them little imps neither, an' I begun to feel pretty suspicious.

"We'll go ourselves," says I, "an' find out what that poppin' is. I shouldn't be a mite nor a grain surprised, neither, if we run into the hull kit an' caboodle of 'em."

All the women folks joined in an' we follered the noises around the platform, down the hill an' over the brook to the edge of Thatcher's Grove.

An' there, huddled together in a little clearin', we did run across the hull kit an' caboodle jest as I said.

In the very centre of the ring stood Si, his hat on the back of his head, his coat off an' that fancy vest unbuttoned an' wavin' in the breeze as he was a-settin' a match to a bunch of firecrackers in his left hand.

"Hi, yi, boys!" he hollered turnin' to run back to a safe distance. "The biggest one yet!" Just then his eye lit on me an' the other women folks in the edge o' the grove an' that was the minute that Si's "teeth clove to the roof of his mouth," sure enough. He stood as if he was rooted to the spot, an' would probbly have been blown sky high by them death dealin' firecrackers o' hisn if the Honourable Tillinghast an' Deacon Blodgett hadn't grabbed hold of him an' dragged him backwards with a jerk that sent Granther Slocum's hat right on top o' the bunch. Land, there wa'n't enough o' that hat left to pick up with a pin an' to think Si might 'a' ben under it!

I couldn't though let my thoughts dwell on no such things as that—my first duty was as a citizen—though female—of Hicksville Center an' a perfessor in good an' reg'lar standin'. "Wal," says I, as cold as an icicle hangin' off the North Pole, "what is the meanin' of all this, I'd like to know?"

Si looked around kinder helpless at the other men folks but they didn't none of 'em appear to notice him, so he had to speak up. "Why—er," says he, at last, "you see we men folks heard some noises, an' so we follered these little imps over here an' found they'd got hold of some fire-crackers, drat 'em."

"Was you a-touchin' of 'em with a ten foot pole?" says I.

"Why—er, Hepsey, the boys wanted that we should learn 'em to set 'em off right. Didn't you, boys?"

Tommy Blodgett, the deacon's youngest son Tom's boy, spoke right up.

"Naw, Mis' Bassett," says he, "him an' grandpa an' the speaker man they jest grabbed 'em away from us an' begun a-settin' of 'em off."

"That's enough for you, young man," says I; "your Grandma Blodgett will settle with you when you git home or I miss my guess. 'Tain't no time to thrash this matter out now anyways, only I hope to the land 'twon't never come to the ears of Boston an' break up the hull movement. Seein's our Sane Fourth has kaflummuxed so, I s'pose we might jest as well tackle right up an' start for home afore there's any more damage done."

The women folks all agreed except Mis' Dr. Wilson, who kep' her eye on the Honourable Tillinghast to see how he felt about it, an' the men folks was glad enough to slink away outer sight an' git the horses. By the time it took 'em to tackle up though, you'd 'a' s'posed they'd unbuckled every separate buckle on the harnesses an' then lost 'em, but land, "one's loss is another's gain," an' Mis' Dr. Wilson an' the Honourable Tillinghast got a chance to visit as much as would 'a' lasted even Emeline for a week. It reelly seemed a shame to break it off when Ezry Porter come to fetch him in his top buggy, but Si driv' up then too in the hay-rack so they had to make up their minds to part.

The ride home wa'n't what you'd call reel cheerful. Mis' Dr. Wilson was so wropped up in her own cogituations that she didn't even try to chirk up Si, same as I expected she would an' I was some wropped too, myself. Jest as we was goin' by Delight's paster agin though I couldn't refrain from rubbin' it into Si a little after all his talk about patterotism an' prospects.

"Si," says I, "was you a-tramplin' 'em under foot as if they was a red flannin petticoat?"

Si kinder switched old Daisy with his whip. "I was a-goin' to, Hepsey," says he; "so was

all on us, when we'd once rendered of 'em harmless."

"The Honourable Tillinghast says," spoke up Mis' Dr. Wilson, comin' to all of a sudden, "that in the hands of grown men, the firecracker is as harmless as a soda cracker or a ginger cooky, an' so it's the grown men's duty to pertect the young of the community by overseein' the job themselves, an' then all will be safe."

I had it on the tip o' my tongue to say, "What about Granther Slocum's hat?" but I didn't. "Least said soonest mended," an' Mis' Dr. Wilson she was company too, so I sailed off on another tack.

"Is the Honourable Tillinghast a married man, Mis' Wilson?" says I, as careless like as I could.

Mis' Dr. Wilson kinder primmed her mouth up an' smiled.

"Not jest at present, Mis' Bassett," says she. "His last consort passed away a year ago in June," an' with that she began to pour out every livin' thing she hern tell of about that man, never stoppin' till we driv' right up to our side stoop.

A while later it come out that Mis' Dr. Wilson had decided not to stay over night an' I wasn't what you call reel right down beat when Roscoe

Conklin' come back from carryin' her to the six o'clock with the news that the Honourable Tillinghast was at the deepo, too, an' took the same train.

We was at the supper table when Roscoe Conklin' come in. I'd thrashed the hull matter out with Si much as I dast an' found out them firecrackers did come from Himie Bennett's, an' he was settin' there mum chance a-drinkin' of his tea, but that was too good a chance to lose, so I turned around an' I says, pointed like, "There, see what you've gone an' done by your foolishness, Si Bartlett; I invited that nice woman, Mis' Dr. Wilson, down to marry you off to same as you wanted, an' them firecrackers has sent her a-flyin' right over to the Honourable Lovejoy Tillinghast instead."

I didn't exactly think so, myself, but I meant to do my hull duty by Si, an' show him his lesson good an' plain.

Si set his cup down right onto the table-cloth.

"Jumpin' Jehosaphat, Hepsey," says he, "is that what you was up to? Was you countin' on splicin' me up to that bag o' bones that wore a meal sack for a skirt?"

"Si Bartlett," says I, "for the good land's sake! Have you gone crazy? She's a reel nice

woman, Mis' Dr. Wilson is, though slim, an' besides she's Roscoe Conklin's a'nt."

"No offense, Roscoe Conklin', no offense," says Si, "but by Ginger, think what I've been spared! I know what Hepsey is when she puts her shoulder to the wheel. She'd 'a' done it, like as not, if she'd set out to. Say, I guess that that Fourth o' mine was a sane one for me after all."

XII

THE BUREAU'S LAST JOB

THERE'S no gittin' around it, my grandson-in-law, Roscoe Conklin' Perkins, has as good a disposition as you'll find anywheres in these United States. You'd 'a' s'posed o' course that he would 'a' been as mad as hops at Si Bartlett on account of them insultin' remarks about his A'nt Sarah Maria. I did myself, but Roscoe Conklin' ain't built that way. Right after supper he went out to the barn along o' Si, an' the hull evenin' long they was a-grinnin' at each other or a-talkin' around in corners as if they was the best friends that ever was. Roscoe Conklin's got reel grace in my opinion, though land he'd be the first one to deny it.

They seemed to keep it up all through breakfast, too, but I didn't have no reelizin' sense of what they was up to until I was jest finishin' the dishes.

In come Roscoe Conklin', then, with a paper in his hand, grinnin' like a Cheshy cat. "Grandma,"

says he, "come here, I've got somethin' to show you, as soon as you git through."

"All right," says I, wringin' out my dish-rag an' hangin' up the tin pan. "Git me my readin' specs from the settin'-room manteltry piece." They was my readin' specs he got fast enough, good, strong ones, too, but land, I couldn't scarcely believe my eyes when I looked at that piece of paper.

"A well-preserved man of sixty odd," it said, "with good habits an' a tidy income wants to marry a good-lookin' widow of about the same age, smart, capable, a good housekeeper, middlin' hefty, with a tongue in her head but a kind heart, an' a helpin' hand. Address B., care of the postmaster, Hicksville Center, Mass."

"For the land's sake," says I, "what on earth? What piece of foolishness is this 'ere, Roscoe Conklin'?"

"'Tain't foolishness," says he. "This is charity, grandma, the kind that 'begins to home.' What do you think of that for an advertisement?"

"A what?" says I.

"An advertisement," says he, "that Si an' me is plannin' to send to the *Helpin' Hand*. Ain't it a jim dandy now?"

"The *Helpin' Hand?*" says I. "Do you mean that matrimony noos sheet that she that was Lyddy Ann Pierce got married out of, an' a poor mess she made of it, too?"

"That's the one," says Roscoe Conklin'. "Sure fire, quick or you lose it, never say die; the matrimony sheet that mats, you bet your life, Grandma Bassett."

"Roscoe Conklin'," says I, "do you s'pose for one minute that I'm goin' to have a parcel of strange females a-comin' here an' marryin' off Si Bartlett under my face an' eyes? Wal, I guess not. You go bring him here to onct!" Roscoe Conklin' rushed right to the back door an' hollered, an' then cut an' run himself.

Si must 'a' been waitin' around the corner, for he come right in an' set down on the kitchen lounge lookin' as sheepish as he had reason to feel. Matrimony papers, humph!

"For the land o' mercy's sakes, Si Bartlett," says I, shakin' the paper at him, "whatever will you be up to next, an' what on earth does this 'ere mean?"

"Business!" says Si, kinder stiffish, "I mean business this time, Hepsey, an' don't you forgit it. It's a good advertisement, hain't it?"

"Was you a-cal'latin' to put that piece into the *Helpin' Hand?*" says I.

"Wal," says Si, "Roscoe Conklin' an' me, we was talkin' some of it."

"Si Bartlett," says I, "hain't you got no more sense than a last year's bird's nest? If you wa'n't satisfied with that nice, toney woman, Mis' Dr. Wilson, do you think you could ever put up with the kind of females that that advertisement would fetch down here to marry you?"

"If I git one like that description," says he, obstinate, "I'll be perfectly contented, an' so will Roscoe Conklin'."

Did you ever see such brass? I maddened right up as well as I might. "Not in my house, Si Bartlett," says I. "You've missed your guess if you think I'll sit quiet while a parcel of bold-faced things come traipsin' here to marry you under my very nose."

"There's one way you can help it," says he, kinder grinnin'.

"How?" says I.

"By providin' of her nearer home," says he, grinnin' still more. "I guess you hain't read that piece real careful, have you, Hepsey?"

"Wal, no," says I, "I was so flabbergasted

by the idee that I *didn't* git reel first-rate sense out of it."

"Then read it again," says he, "an' read it careful. It takes a reel smart woman to be as blind as a bat sometimes 'bout her own business."

With the light of that remark a-shinin' through my specs I read it again an' land I was so struck in a heap that I jest couldn't ketch my breath. So that was what Si had been drivin' at. I've been beat before in my time, but this was the top notchin'est beat that ever come in my direction.

"Name o' Hepsey preferred," says Si, chucklin', as he set there an' watched me gaspin' like a fish outer water. "Did Roscoe Conklin' put that in, Hepsey? I told him to."

"No," says I, "but mercy, I don't s'pose I should 'a' seen it if he had. Do you s'pose anything's the matter with my eyesight, Si Bartlett, honest, or be I losin' my faculties?"

"It's that blamed old Matrimony Bureau," says Si, thumpin' his knee. "I've been a-makin' up to you stiddy ever sence last fall, Hepsey Bassett, an' you was so took up with that goldarned Bureau o' yourn that you never sensed it. 'Twas the last straw tho', when I dressed up so fancy yestiddy to please you, an' learned that long speech an' all, to have your old Bureau let

loose that Mis' Dr. Wilson onto me. By ginger! I struck then. Say, Hepsey, will you give up the job of marryin' off the rest of the farmamint an' bring your mind down onto bein' married to me for the rest of your days? We git on first rate."

I kinder run over the matter hasty in my mind afore I answered. Most of Hicksville Center was safely married off by that time, or at least settin' up with good prospects. There wa'n't reelly only enough old maids an' widders left to tend to the odd jobs, so I guessed I was justified in throwin' up my stent an' takin' comfort myself for a spell.

"All right, Si," says I. "Mebbe 'twould save you a little money on the advertisement!"

Jest then the front entry door bust open an' in rushed Roscoe Conklin' an' Hitty May.

"All serene," says he, "Grandpa Bartlett? Then bless you, my children, bless you! Only, grandma," says he, shakin' his finger at me, "you've got to promise me one thing. When the preacher says, 'Who give this woman to be married to this man?' I'm to be the one to say, 'Yours truly,' ain't I?"

"Elder Pease ain't never one to go pryin' into folkses private affairs like that," says I, "an', besides, Roscoe Conklin' Perkins, you're a

sassy boy, sassy as they make 'em. Still, I dunno, if anybody ever should ask me what was the best job my Matrimony Bureau done, I guess I'd say loud an' plain, 'The first one.' "

"Wal, I sha'n't," says Si, chucklin' same as he used to, an' it seemed good to hear him, too. "I shall say the last one, by Jingo."

"Why, Grandpa Bartlett," says Roscoe Conklin', "have you forgot already that this was my job? Who thought of advertisin' for grandma, I'd like to know?"

"Wal," says I, cuttin' in quick to save trouble, "then the first is the last, same as Scripter says, an' that Matrimony Bureau is at the bottom of two A No. 1 jobs, anyways."

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